PS3 PlayStation 3 | PSP PlayStation Portable | PlayStation 2

PlayStation
The Official Magazine

Issue 047 July 2011

WORLD EXCLUSIVE
SCREENS! SECRETS! FIRE-BREATHING DRAGONS!

- Uncharted 3
- BioShock: Infinite
- Twisted Metal
- Tomb Raider
- Starhawk

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PlayStation®
The Official Magazine

JULY 2011

COVER FEATURE

48 ELDER SCROLLS V: SKYRIM
It's time to give those lungs a workout, shouting maniacally in Bethesda's gorgeous looking role-playing adventure. Thrill to exclusive screens and all-new information, or be damned!

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22 **TWISTED METAL**
The longest-running PlayStation-exclusive franchise blazes its way toward its long-awaited release date. We're so excited we want to dress up like a clown and set our hair on fire.

80 **DIRT 3**
Take the long and winding road to high-speed thrills with this challenging offroad racer.

Net Loss

Who's to blame for the woes afflicting PSN?

"Your honor, they left the front door unlocked, and they had all that nice stuff prominently displayed in their living room window. I just couldn't help myself..."

Imagine entering a court of law—or even public opinion—with that half-assed defense. Yes, temptations abound everywhere, and we are all individually responsible for our own ineptitude when it comes to safeguarding the stuff we value most. But just because we might make it easy doesn't mean we deserve to be robbed, violated, looted, pillaged.

And that, in my estimation, is what's lost in all this discussion about the great, horrible, terrible, no good, very bad PSN outage of 2011. Sony was attacked. (Or, intruded externally, to cop their jargon.) This attack was malicious. And this attack was delivered with the intent to harm.

To be fair, Sony must shoulder its share of responsibility: for not doing a good enough job of protecting confidential information; and, perhaps, for not informing us as quickly as we'd have liked (though Sony has counter claims suggesting they moved as quickly as they could given the circumstances). Moreover, Sony will have to roll up its sleeves and put in even longer hours to ensure they win back our trust—especially when it comes to online credit card purchases.

If you're wondering where PTOM stands on this issue: that's still to be determined. As of press time, PSN is still not up—and my inside sources suggest the whole story won't be known until E3 (right around when this issue hits newsstands). Rather than spewing out more bile, I feel it's our responsibility to wait until we can deliver the full story—with insight from Sony and other key sources—once that full story exists. For now, though, it's offline gaming, with hope for a brighter online future.

GARY

Gary Steinman
Editor in Chief
twitter.com/TinyManRages

Gary Steinman
Editor in Chief

Even pared down to a sensational six, PTOM continues to crush all in its wake. This is because editor Gary Steinman owns stock in a steamroller conglomerate, but also because of his uncompromising dedication to crushing.

Greg Orlando
Executive Editor

For those who viewed *Greg Orlando: The Greg Orlando Story, Greg Orlando 2: Electric Boogaloo,* and *Greg Orlando 3: Greg Orlando Buys An Umbrella,* we regret to inform you your court-ordered refund is going to Greg Orlando.

Ken Bousquet
Art Director

People might think, "Oh, look, it's Ken Bousquet. He must be making PTOM look gorgeous." They'd be correct in that assumption, although Ken also plays soccer because, hey, he can do whatever he wants. Period.

Roger Burchill
Managing Editor

A little piece of Roger Burchill is in every copy of this particular issue. By which we mean he fell into a vat of printer ink. We hope he returns as his robot replacement is, quite frankly, a stupid jerkface.

Scott Butterworth
Associate Editor

Scott Butterworth is up in the polls, down with the free market, in with the in crowd, and out of sight but hardly out of mind. Where lesser men walk, Scott has opted for the dropkick as his preferred style of locomotion.

Anne Lewis
Editorial Intern

Plucky ne'er-do-well intern Anne Lewis may be the delicate tulip blossoming amid the carnage of no man's land, or the answer to the question no one asked. Either way, we think Anne will go far, most likely via a cannon shot.

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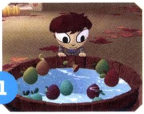
PSN
Best Games

It's the best of the best! Get the lowdown on this month's PSN goodies no one should live without.

BEST FULL GAMES



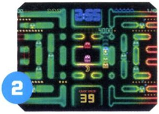
1

Tricks and Treats

Costume Quest

Sure, it's Halloween themed, but the adventure itself is timeless. With candy and monster-smiting in equal measure, this sugary delight is a charming homage to *Final Fantasy X-2*, enhanced by Tim Schafer's humor.

9 Pub **THQ**
Dev **Double Fine**



2

Retro Revival

Pac-Man Championship Ed.

There'll always be a place in our hearts for gaming's gluttonous yellow goober—but nostalgia be damned, this retro homage offers a whole new frenetic take on the classic gameplay.

9 Pub **Namco Bandai**
Dev **Namco Bandai**

3

Platforming Puzzle Racer

Joe Danger

A mix of *ExciteBike*-style racing and insane stunt-driven platforming action, this vibrant indie gem shines brightly among the best PSN offerings available. Getting wild and dangerous has never been this awesome.

9 Pub **Hello Games**
Dev **Hello Games**

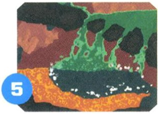
4

Zen Exploration

Flower

This gorgeous concept game makes blowing hordes of fluttering petals around a lush natural environment into an unforgettable experience that holds up against the biggest triple-A offerings. Don't pass this one up.

9 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **thatgamecompany**



5

Puzzle Shooter

PixelJunk Shooter

The fourth entry in the *PixelJunk* series is easily the best. Saving trapped mining colonists with a versatile, environmental puzzle-solving ship is a creative and challenging affair taxing both the mind and reflexes.

9 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Q-Games**

6

Lettuce Defend Ourselves

Plants vs. Zombies

This ubiquitous tower defense game has made the platform rounds, but there's no denying its insidious charms and eternal goofiness. Hours will be spent meticulously maintaining the grid-like lawn in an attempt to fend off the rampaging waves of groaning, brain-chomping zombies.

9 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **PopCap Games**

7

Surreal Puzzler

Braid

Here's another instance where gaming melds with art. *Braid's* blend of captivating presentation, engrossing story, and mind-bending time-based puzzles makes for one of the most weird, wonderful platforming, puzzle-solving experiences available on PSN.

8 Pub **Hothead Games**
Dev **Number None**

8

Dolled-Up Adventure

Stacking

Double Fine games come chock full of personality and charm. Using babushka dolls to solve puzzles and explore a '30s Depression-era-esque world of miniature mannequins may not seem all that compelling, but it is. This is a fine argument for Double Fine to make more PSN titles.

8 Pub **THQ**
Dev **Double Fine**

9

Cool New Old School

Scott Pilgrim vs. The World

Read Bryan Lee O'Malley's excellent *Scott Pilgrim* graphic novel series, see the film, and then battle for love in this retro-style brawler. It's not often we can recommend all three—this is a licensed game done right, and one that pays homage in grand fashion.

8 Pub **Ubisoft**
Dev **Ubisoft**

10

Tower of Power

PixelJunk Monsters

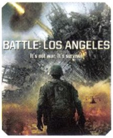
What's one to do when monsters attack? How about earning funds and building offensive towers featuring varying attributes like speed, range, and power? Or, we could invite them in for diplomatic discussions and tea, but what fun is that?

8 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Q-Games**

PSN Video Delivery Service Spotlight

What we're watching on our PS3 this month

"Sh–t, I'd rather be in Afghanistan."



Battle: Los Angeles

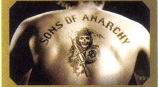
ETA **June 14** Rated **PG-13** Genre **Action** Studio **Sony Pictures/Columbia Pictures**

Seeking water—and Los Angeles being a repository of the fancy bottled kind—aliens invade Los Angeles. As northern Californians, we're not all broken up about the notion, but we welcome any excuse to watch Aaron Eckhart and Michelle Rodriguez involved in a massive special effects destructo-thon. Besides, it's always wise to nip these incursions in the bud before the aliens discover and develop a hankerin' for Rice-A-Roni. 'Cause we all know where they're headed if that happens.

Top VDS Downloads

Movies

- *TRON: Legacy*
- *Little Fockers*
- *Black Swan*
- *Tangled*
- *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows - Part 1*



TV Shows

- *Sons of Anarchy: Season 3*
- *Archer: Season 2*
- *Family Guy: Season 9*
- *Smallville: Season 10*
- *Thor & Loki Blood Brothers: Season 1*

BEST FREE STUFF

1

Kid-friendly MMO

Free Realms
Basic Game

The PS3 version of Sony's fantasy MMO is finally out. Grabbing this download grants access to the game's basic features. Optional premium content is available, too, but it requires a subscription.

Pub **SOE**
Dev **SOE**

2

Hack-'n'-Slash Pack

Lord of Arcana
Pack 5

The deluge of free missions continues. Four adventures have us conquering dragon lords, saving husbands from an early demise, testing our ruling abilities, and halting a subterranean invasion.

Pub **Square Enix**
Dev **Square Enix**

3

Hunka Wrestlin' Love

WWE All-Stars
Honky Tonk Man

This freebie lets us hit the ring with the full awesome fury of the Honky Tonk Man. Armed with killer sideburns and a mean swagger, this burly dude can bring the ruckus. Guitar insurance recommended.

Pub **THQ**
Dev **THQ San Diego**

4

Gangbusters

Yakuza 4
Upgrade Pack

The highlight of this pack are its two new karaoke songs, but it also develops Kiryu and Haruka's relationship and offers a slew of sweet extra items to use. Damn it feels good to be a gangsta.

Pub **Sega**
Dev **Sega**

5

Splatterproof

Swarm
Wallpapers

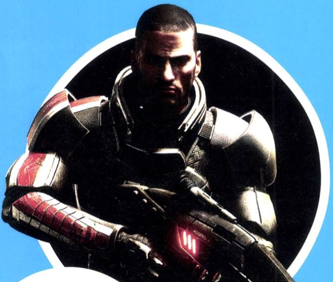
Swarmites are rarely seen on their own in the wild, but this quartet of loveable, free PS3 wallpapers show the little buggers in solo candid poses without their pulsing entourage of blue craziness.

Pub **Ignition Entertainment**
Dev **Hothead Games**

IN THE MOOD FOR...

Hackers

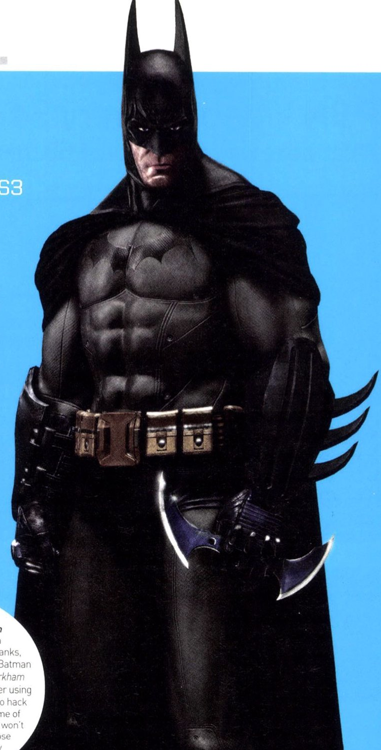
Get on the other side of the conflict on PS3



Commander John Shepard

Mass Effect 2

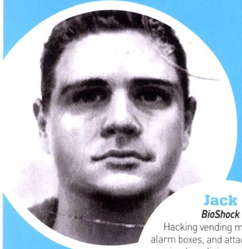
Male or female, grotesque or beautiful—however Shepard is customized, he/she will face three distinct types of hacking challenges during this epic space adventure. Matching identical lines of code or similar circuit nodes doesn't have the same appeal as zapping enemies and smooth talking the locals, but a true commander has to be versatile.



Batman

Batman: Arkham Asylum

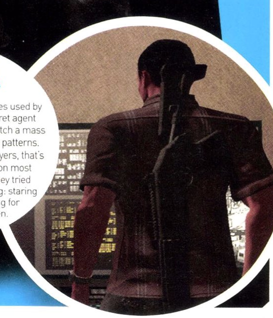
With a sharp mind and a gargantuan bank account (thanks, inheritance!), is there anything Batman can't do? Apparently not, as *Arkham Asylum* sees the Caped Crusader using his Cryptographic Sequencer to hack security panels and solve some of Riddler's Challenges. Sadly, it won't hack any respect out of those silly goons he continually pummels.



Jack

BioShock

Hacking vending machines, alarm boxes, and attack drones is as simple as lining up a bunch of pipes to let the water flow from point A to point B. Granted, the consequences for screwing up can be deadly, but wouldn't most folks rearrange a few pipes to save a buck or two in the employee break room?



Michael Thornton

Alpha Protocol

Unlike the graphic interfaces used by the rest of the bunch, secret agent Michael Thornton has to watch a mass of moving text and look for patterns. Frustrating as it was for players, that's probably the exact position most newbies would be in if they tried their hands at real hacking: staring at a screen and waiting for the magic to happen.

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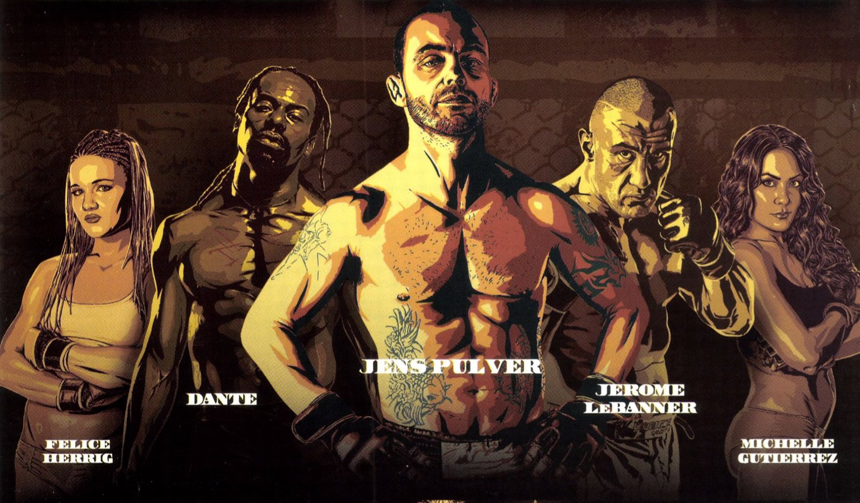
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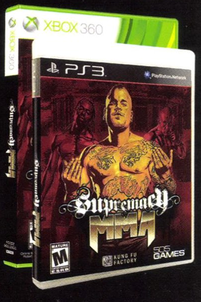
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REVOLUTION BEGINS
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TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood
Language
Violence
Games for Windows
XBOX 360
XBOX LIVE
PS3
splash damage
Bethesda

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qore

Presented by the PlayStation®Network

Inside Qore Episode 38

Don't Stop Believin'

Put aside your preconceived notions of what a game should be, and settle into *Journey*, an adventure about being present in the setting as much as following a story. The developers at Thatgamecompany guide us through their process. *Captain America: Super Soldier* busts heads in this WWII action game. His combo system feels powerful and, dare we say it, patriotic. Ted Price, the creator of Insomniac Games, explains what keeps him up at night and gives us a peek into his next titles. And the *No More Heroes: Heroes' Paradise* swordplay gets to the point with the Move.

VERONICA BELMONT HOST OF QORE

Available 7/5/2011 on the

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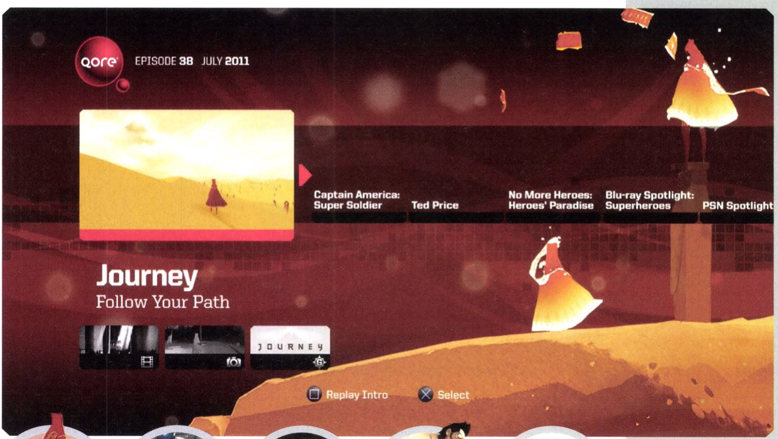
qore
EPISODE 38 JULY 2011
Captain America: Super Soldier
Ted Price
No More Heroes: Heroes' Paradise
Blu-ray Spotlight: Superheroes
PSN Spotlight
Journey
Follow Your Path
JOURNEY
☐ Replay Intro
☒ Select

Journey
Pack your bags, and remember to smell the roses.

Captain America: Super Soldier
Get it done with your hands and shield.

Ted Price
Our profile of this Insomniac legend will fill you with dreams of *Resistance 3* and *Ratchet & Clank: All 4 One*.

No More Heroes: Heroes' Paradise
Future-punks, meet the Move-wielded plasma sword.

Blu-ray Spotlight - Superheroes
Slip into your spandex and check out our favorite superhero-themed Blu-rays.

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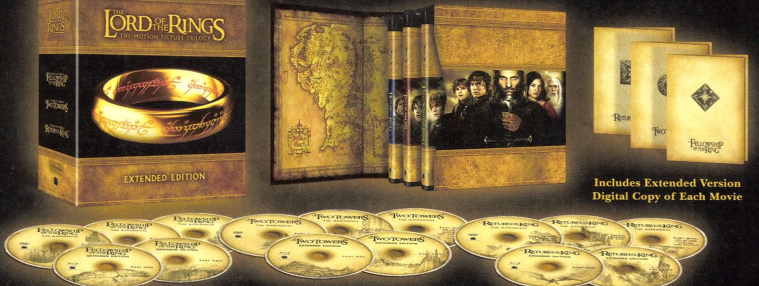
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The PlayStation Entertainment Plan

Fill up your life with our monthly guide

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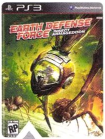
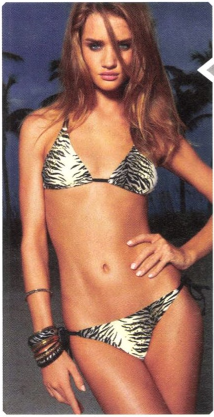




JUL 01

Dark of the Moon

The new *Transformers* movie is out today and Rosie Huntington-Whitely takes over for Megan Fox as the leading lady. Is it too much to hope for a rivals Jell-O fight?

02

Anime Expo July 1-4

Ahhh... Anime Expo: time for women to become men, and men to become animals. Or women. We're not here to judge.

04

Fourth of July

Today we celebrate our independence by getting drunk and setting off illegal fireworks. What better way to commemorate our founding fathers?

05

In stores:
Earth Defense Force: Insect Armageddon

08

The Birth of Bousquet

On this day of days we celebrate the birth of the creative artistic genius behind our ramshackle little operation. Happy birthday, Ken!

ROBOT CHICKEN
STAR WARS
III

12

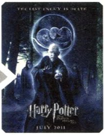
In stores:
Robot Chicken Star Wars: Episode III comes out on Blu-ray today, just in case we needed another reason to stare at our TV screens.

Also: *NCAA Football 12*

15

The End is Nigh

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows – Part II, the end of the series, arrives in theaters. Spoiler: Harry is a wizard. Who knew?



17

Rock On July 14-17

We don't live anywhere near Wisconsin, but if we listen closely, we'll probably be able to hear Rock Fest from here. Those darn kids and their "muzak."

18

The Happiest Place on Earth

Disneyland opened its gates on this day in 1955. We may be "grown-ups," but there is nothing wrong with the secret love we harbor for the teacup ride.

19

PS3
CAPTAIN AMERICA

In stores:
Captain America: Super Soldier

SAN DIEGO COMIC CON INTERNATIONAL

21

Comic-Con July 21-24

On the heels of Anime Expo, we expect to see a lot less girls in sailor fukus, and a lot more men in spandex. Everyone has their niche.

22

Captain America

The *Captain America* movie has us on the fence, but our intern assures us that Chris Evans will save the movie because he is "just dreamy." We'll see about that.

26

With a C or a K?

Pillows, sheep, and beautiful ladies come together today in *Catherine*, a twisted puzzle/adventure game from the makers of *Persona*.

Also in stores:
The Cursed Crusade

29

Best Looking Homeless Evar

On this sad day in 1988, the last U.S. Playboy Club, located in Lansing, Michigan, closed. Yes, we cried.

PLAYBOY

* Release dates are subject to change by the publishers.

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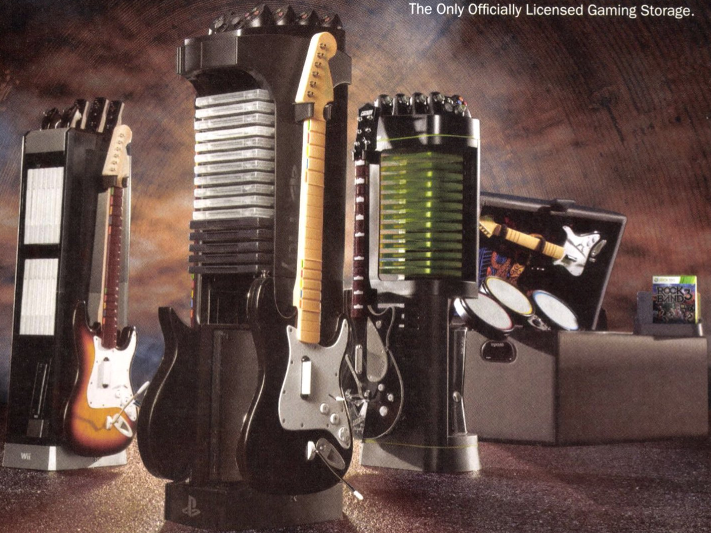

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The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

Chop Shop
War in the North's combat system picked apart—one limb at a time.

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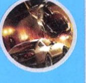
Safety Last
Need for Speed takes off across the country. We give chase.



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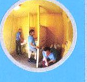
Revelatory
Prepare for a killer reunion in Assassin's Creed: Revelations.

⏩Page 16

Mega Men
Comedic alchemists Mega64 reveal their formula.



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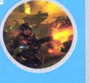
The Great Debate
Co-op multiplayer: a contradiction in terms? PTOM eds shoot it out.



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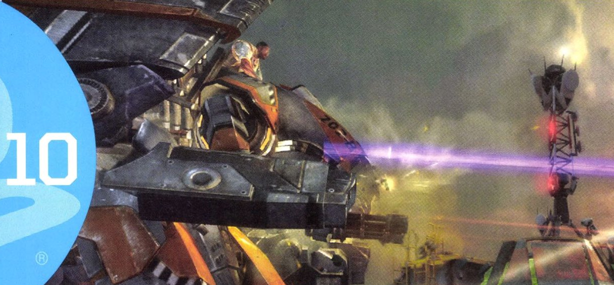


1

Building a better shooter

Starhawk makes players the architects of their opponents' utter destruction

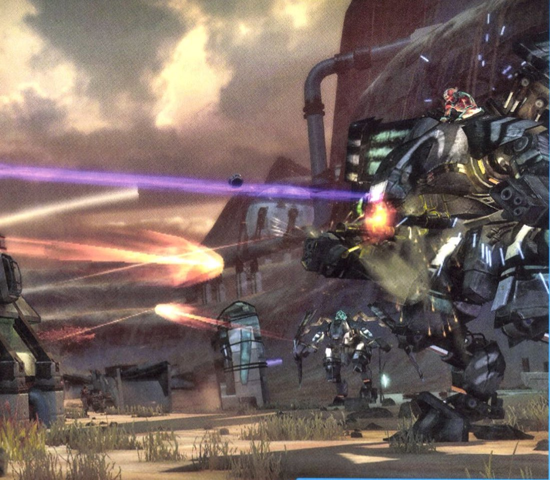
Wicked witches everywhere had better watch out: the team at Austin startup LightBox Interactive has actually managed to weaponize buildings. No, they didn't invent a brick-and-mortar gun—they simply added on-the-fly RTS elements to *Warhawk's* vehicle-heavy, third-person shooter gameplay.

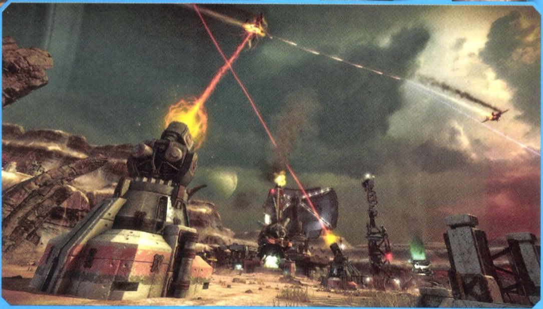
While most shooters set players down a linear path populated with predictable A.I. and scripted set pieces, *Starhawk* is "area based," meaning missions take place on a single giant battlefield rather than a narrow series of corridors, and enemies spawn dynamically rather than waiting behind strategically placed crates. The reason? Fast-paced, over-the-shoulder, run-and-gun action is only part of the equation.

In addition to wielding the usual quasi-futuristic assault rifles and shotguns, players will be able to construct various military installations—such as auto-turrets, *Warhawk* launch pads, and ally-spawning bunkers—anywhere on the battlefield. Using energy collected from fallen enemies, players simply have to open the radial Build menu, highlight the desired building, and place a holographic 3D model of the structure on the battlefield—at which point the actual structure will rocket down from space (gloriously crushing anything beneath it) and assemble itself automatically.

The beauty of this system is that it takes place entirely in real time. There's no top-down world map or tedious unit management; aside from running around collecting energy orbs from fallen adversaries, there's not even resource management. All friendly soldiers and turrets are entirely autonomous, leaving players free to focus on strategically building more cool stuff or just blasting the hell out of some bad guys.

Best of all, vehicles still play an active role in the experience, so after mowing down some enemies and gathering enough energy to build a launch pad, players can go ahead and





jump into the cockpit of a Warhawk and take to the skies just as they did in the original game.

Space Cowboys

The aptly named Build and Battle system isn't the only major addition, however. Unlike its spiritual predecessor, *Starhawk* features a full story-driven single-player campaign in addition to its substantial multiplayer offering. The story centers around a resource called Rift Energy, a substance so valuable it triggers what amounts to a sci-fi gold rush. Miners flock to the far reaches of space in hopes of striking it rich, setting up claims and colonies along the way.

Unfortunately, anyone exposed directly to Rift Energy either dies or mutates into an inhuman creature called an Outcast... with one exception: protagonist Emmett Graves. Instead of fully mutating, he's able to retain his human form using some serious technology, though he lives in constant pain and didn't gain any awesome Cole MacGrath-style powers. Plus, he's cast out from society despite not actually being an Outcast. As a result, he's become a Rift Salvager—essentially a mercenary who travels from claim to claim to out the Outcasts so the miners can continue their work.

We're not sure what Emmett's endgame is, but the sci-fi universe definitely evokes the TV show *Firefly*, and the *Red Faction* meets *Starcraft* gameplay is already looking slick and spectacular. Even gamers who would normally never touch an RTS should have no problem dropping buildings on their enemies when *Starhawk* launches in early 2012.

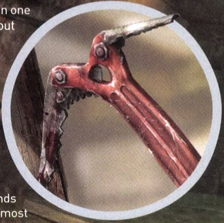
"It's a completely different game. It's a completely new IP. But it definitely holds *Warhawk's* DNA." **—Lars DeVore, Creative Director**

2

Surviving and thriving

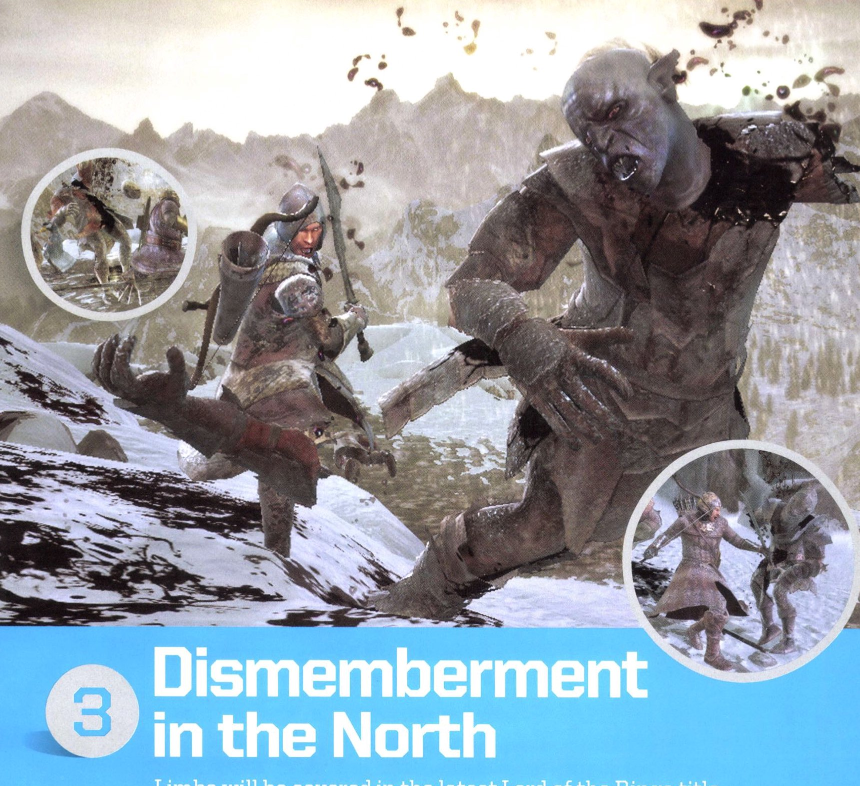
We take a peek under Tomb Raider's hood to see what makes the new Lara Croft tick

Player Gater
The concept of "gear gating" has been one that the team has held onto throughout development. While Lara will have access to items that make her more potent, they are doled out carefully to the player. At the end of our demonstration, for example, Lara is provided her first item, a climbing ax. "Being given the climbing ax changes her relationship with [that] space," says creative director Noah Hughes. "At first it's daunting—she has all kinds of things in the space that present almost insurmountable challenges around her. But the acquisition of a piece of gear like that allows her to become that much more capable of overcoming those obstacles." The idea is not to overwhelm the player with options, but to present a more concise, effective means of overcoming challenges.



Happy Camper
Located throughout the island on which Lara is shipwrecked are several base camps. These are where Lara can combine items to create something new, as well as access a skill system to upgrade her abilities. Base camps will also be used to fast travel to different locations, and thereby minimize backtracking and commute time. "It's a superstructure around all of our pillars that's also delivered in a survival flavor," says Hughes.

Pace Is the Place
A variety of gameplay styles and mechanics are at the heart of the *Tomb Raider* experience. The core pillars are survival in its various forms (including escapes and situational analysis), exploration/traversal, and combat. "We love the pacing variety that we provide," says Hughes of the admixture. "Even in your 'critical path' story, even before you get tired of one form of gameplay, we've got you on to the next. In addition to that, if you do have an appetite for one [style of gameplay] over another, you can pursue content that's optional. That's really important to us."



3 Dismemberment in the North

Limbs will be severed in the latest Lord of the Rings title

We at PTOM believe it is our right to slice and dice virtual enemies with the type of unhinged joy reserved for children at birthday parties when the piñata is brought out. Snowblind Studios, the developer behind *Champions of Norrath* and *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance*, respects our feelings.

Snowblind's new limb-severing feature will be present in its latest title, *Lord of the Rings: War in the North*, and will allow us to fluidly perform a dismemberment attack during combat. After racking up enough combat experience, we can enter Heroic mode, allowing us to perform more powerful and vicious attacks, eventually leading up to severs. Once an enemy has been thoroughly hacked and slashed, an icon will appear over its head, alerting us to a limb sever opportunity. Hitting the heavy-attack button will send an arm, a leg, or a head flying off in the direction of the attack. "Where you hit it, the limb flies off," explains game programmer Zach Peterson—though he informs us we won't always be able to target a specific limb. In an effort to account for a range of combat outcomes, a sever attack won't always mean game over for a baddie. Undoubtedly, no head means no future, but an attack can continue with a loss of an arm.

This new limb-severing feature is more than just gore for gore's sake. As the first mature-rated *Lord of the Rings* videogame, *War in the North* strives to offer a grittier representation of J.R.R. Tolkien's fantasy world. "We are trying to make this a darker take on Middle-earth," says Peterson, "and we want it to be a more brutal, war-torn environment."

The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

4 Speed Thrills

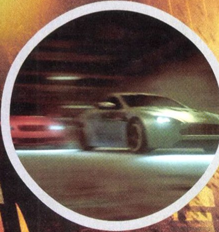
The Run revives Need for Speed's story-based past

If the seemingly back-to-back blockbuster releases of *Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit* and *Shift 2: Unleashed* weren't enough to satisfy series fans, perhaps *Need for Speed: The Run*—recently announced for a November 15 release—will do the trick.

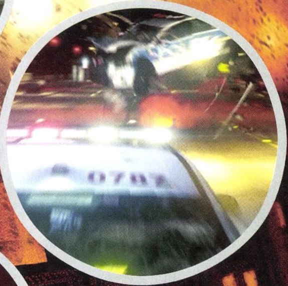
Developed by Black Box—the Electronic Arts studio responsible for past franchise entries such as *Need for Speed: Carbon* and *Need for Speed: Undercover*—*The Run* looks to return the series to the narrative-focused approach of those and other iterations, spotlighting an illicit, country-spanning race beginning in San Francisco and ending in New York. Along the way, players can expect action-packed chase events and races through dusty desert towns, icy mountain paths, and thick city traffic.

Just as notable is the news that *The Run* will be powered by DICE's Frostbite 2.0 engine—the same one responsible for running the hotly anticipated *Battlefield 3*. Plus, *The Run* will utilize the excellent Autolog system introduced in *Hot Pursuit*, which tracks the times and scores of PSN friends, providing the constant temptation to one-up our fellow gamers.

While other details remain under lock and key, the initial teaser trailer offered a tantalizing taste of what *Need for Speed* aficionados can expect in this striking new entry: crazy-fast cars, collisions, police pursuers, and a young man (Jack, likely a lead character) kicking out the windshield in his overturned car as a train barrels toward him.



■ Expect supercars galore and a serious disregard of traffic laws. We've spotted an Audi R8, a Ford GT500, and Aston Martins and Porsches thus far.



■ The cops will be out in force, and visible bullet holes in cars indicate they won't be afraid to use it either.

■ All driving and no set pieces would make Jack a dull boy. The trailer has our hero trapped, upside-down, on train tracks.

The Run will utilize NFS: Hot Pursuit's excellent Autolog system

SHELBY
NEED FOR SPEED
GT500

5 Assassin freed

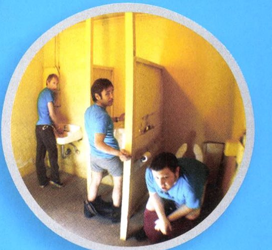
Long-hidden hero Altaïr joins Ezio in Assassin's Creed: Revelations

Ready for a fresh round of confounding plotlines and rooftop shenanigans? Due this November, *Assassin's Creed: Revelations* concludes the tale of Ezio Auditore—star of the previous two *Creed* entries—with a fresh adventure taking the 16th-century assassin to the Turkish city of Constantinople (now Istanbul), where the enemy Templars have amassed a formidable army.

But while *Revelations* marks the end of Ezio's journey, it's also a rebirth of sorts, as white-clad protagonist Altaïr returns as a fully playable character for the first time since the original *Assassin's Creed*. Plus, Desmond Miles—the modern-day descendent of both warriors—reappears once more to anchor the time-bending adventure.

Beyond the tri-hero solo campaign, which Ubisoft says includes the ability to "manipulate the construct of Desmond's memories and the Animus," the game also reprises the online multiplayer offering that debuted in *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood*, albeit with some notable enhancements. Alongside new maps and playable characters, series fans can expect additional play modes, which will create unique opportunities to knock the world's top assassins down a peg.

Ubisoft Montreal is again leading development on the latest entry, albeit with support from five other studios (Ubi's Annecy, Bucharest, Massive, Quebec, and Singapore branches), which should indicate the ever-expanding scale of this behemoth franchise. *Brotherhood* felt a little light on essential story details and progression, but perhaps *Revelations* will be a bit more forthcoming. After all, it's right there in the title—Ubisoft can't back down now!



"I predict that there will be girls there in bikinis, working at the booths." –*Derrick Acosta, Mega64*

6

64-carat-gold

Mega64 makes mirth, Internet videos

"The less we think, the more they laugh," says Rocco Botte.

Botte, along with his friends and co-conspirators Derrick Acosta and Shawn Chatfield, make up Mega64, a troupe dedicated to filming classically funny videogame parodies. Their videos are the stuff of Internet comedy gold; Rocco dressed in a long jacket and hood, channeling the vendor in *Resident Evil 4*, approaching people, bleating out "What're you buying?" and "What're you selling?" and giggling maniacally, or the guys ambushing a paperboy with a real-life creation of the arcade hit *Paperboy* complete with a guy juggling fire and a shambling mummy.

Mega64's videos are scattered across the Internet, from Mega64.com to YouTube. It gained a following and enough goofy credibility that game creators Gabe Newell and Yu Suzuki have participated in their videos. The group further expanded its repertoire with a series of goofball interviews with developers such as Peter Molyneux and Cory Barlog—interviews conducted with Chatfield manipulating a mustachioed puppet named Marcus.

The formula is simple: guerrilla video not overly planned. The group discusses games and elements it finds dumb—and thus the fodder for parody—within those games. "It sounds lazy," says Botte, "but we actually think we work better when not writing scripts. We try to keep things improvised, and that just makes things funnier." The same philosophy carries over to costume making. "If you went out and bought an actual costume it would probably look legit, but that's not what we go for," says Chatfield.

"We usually have a three-to-five man group," Acosta says about the filming process. "We keep it real small when we go out so we can be very secretive and not attract a lot of attention."

The formula works, although it does have its perils. "We have found that coaches don't like us," says Botte. "If we are within a hundred yards of a sporting event the coach will come over and try to fight us. But for the most part, I don't feel that we ever do, or we try not to do, anything that is genuinely mean-spirited, or anything really that bad. That's what I think is entertaining about a lot of Mega64 videos."

Mega64 Predicts

The prognosticators at Mega64 were challenged to predict what would happen at this year's E3.

Derrick: I predict there will be girls there in bikinis, working at the booths.

Shawn: They will look miserable.

Rocco: Someone will touch one of their butts.

Shawn: No one will ask to take a picture with any of them.

Derrick: The Phantom [game console] will re-emerge.

The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

7

Interaction figures

The toys have brains in Skylanders Spyro's Adventure

Don't credit (blame?) us for the easy pun in the above headline. That's straight out of the marketing materials for Activision's new take on Spyro the dragon. But don't dismiss it, either: It is, perhaps, the most apt description for *Skylanders Spyro's Adventure*, an innovative toy/game hybrid that might have what it takes to dethrone the Pokémons of the world.

Here's how it works: Choosing from 32 different characters (including, naturally, Spyro)—all available separately at under $10 each—players can use their selected toy/avatar to enter a virtual world, where they can partake in arena battles and co-op adventures. While this kind of thing has been done before with other kid toys, the difference here is significant. First, each toy has a "brain" allowing it to retain information about experience, loot, and upgrades earned along the way. Each toy also has a different elemental association along with unique attacks, upgrades, and playable challenges. Spyro, for example, starts out with Fire Breath as a primary attack and can upgrade to Spread Fire, whereas the water-based Gill Grunt begins with a Harpoon Gun and can eventually access a Triple Harpoon Shot and Water Launcher. These customization options, we're told, lend themselves to both co-op play and player-vs.-player battles.

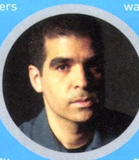
Perhaps most intriguing of all, the game isn't limited to a single console. We (or, more likely, our kid brothers) can take our critters along with us to a friend's house and continue our adventures on *their* PS3, retaining all the XP and loot we've already earned. That's provided our pals also have their own starter kit, which includes the game, the "portal of power" interface, three figures, three cards, and a poster. And beyond the console game, there's also a web-based world to explore, available to all.

Kids' stuff? Sure. But, if the gameplay is even halfway decent, we suspect we'll be borrowing our baby brother's *Skylanders* collection come this fall.

8 Mortal Musings

Post-release thoughts on Mortal Kombat

Ed Boon, *Mortal Kombat's* ko-kreator—sorry, co-creator—has been making fighting games since 1992. He's been with the *Kombat* franchise since its arcade days, when the fighters were digitized versions of real actors. He's seen the franchise sink under the weight of two absolutely horrible Hollywood films, a terrible animated show, and a god awful live-action television show.



Now, however, Boon's gory fighter is on the rise once more. The new *Mortal Kombat* game offers a return to the series' two-dimensional roots and is as gloriously gory as it ever was.

Here's Boon's take on some of the game's more kontroversial design choices:

The addition of X-ray moves

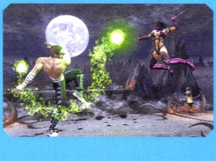
"We wanted to have this killer, over-the-top supermove. We've been showing external damage on our characters for so long, where else do you go but on the insides?"

The pared-down fighter roster

"I certainly don't think every *Mortal Kombat* has been perfect. [*Mortal Kombat*] *Armageddon* I thought had too many characters—it had 64 characters. Our goal was to be all-encompassing: *Armageddon* was almost a *Mortal Kombat Trilogy II*. It was kind of like every character that ever appeared in the game. The problem is, 64 characters, people see that and they're just like, 'Where do I start?' You might as well put up a thousand player select boxes. At some point, it's not better anymore."

Kombat's blood and gore

"*Mortal Kombat* has a very distinct personality. It's insanely over-the-top violent to the point that I don't think anybody can even take it seriously anymore. It's not gruesome. It's just so over-the-top violent that it's like this campy, funny thing."



9 The Readers' Most Wanted

Aren't we a forward-looking bunch! As of press time, the latest *Call of Duty* has only just emerged, but we suspect it'll be fully on show at E3. Meanwhile, the No.2 choice, *Final Fantasy XIV*, has been indefinitely delayed in order to be revamped—we're hopeful we'll also learn more about it at E3, so we can report back on what might be two of the biggest multiplayer releases of 2011. Meanwhile, Sony retains its run of top-10 appearances for its hat trick of first-party exclusives, led by the hotly anticipated *Uncharted 3*.

01	*Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3*
02	*Final Fantasy XIV*
03	*Final Fantasy XIII-2*
04	*Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception*
05	*inFamous 2*
06	*Twisted Metal*
07	*Battlefield 3*
08	*Batman: Arkham City*
09	*Resistance 3*
10	*Duke Nukem Forever*
11	*BioShock: Infinite*
12	*The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*
13	*Ratchet & Clank: All 4 One*
14	*L.A. Noire*
15	*F.E.A.R. 3*
16	*Mass Effect 3*
17	*Ico / Shadow of the Colossus Collection*
18	*Max Payne 3*
19	*X-Men: Destiny*
20	*The Last Guardian*

TWISTED METAL

INFAMOUS 2

Stats in this chart appear courtesy of Ipsos OTX MediaCT's GamePlan Insights. All games are PS3 titles. Polling period was April 17, 2011, to April 30, 2011.

10

Is competitive online multiplayer broken?

Yes

Says the woefully cynical loner **Scott Butterworth**

Strangers on the Internet are dicks. Myself included. When it's us against the game—as in *Portal 2's* co-op or *Bulletstorm's* Anarchy mode—we have no problem working together. But introduce any kind of direct competition with another human being and we suddenly become selfish, hyper-competitive meatheads.

This is why shooters built around choosing a class and creating a balanced team never work. When was the last time anyone jumped into a team deathmatch in *Killzone* and wound up on a squad where the entire class range was utilized in a larger cohesive effort? It's never happened to me. And frankly, that's a waste.

One could argue that with time and practice, a team could learn to capitalize on a game's mechanics. But in my mind, the real problem is that no one has managed to effectively incentivize cooperation in a competitive setting. Personally, I'm so often concerned with my own kill/death ratio that I fail to even notice whether my team is winning or losing.

Maybe I'm just a poor sport, but my online experience tells me that I'm not the only one guilty of this. So here's a modest proposal: Let's eliminate stat tracking. If the only metric by which success can be measured is the outcome of a match, wouldn't players be more willing to work together? Maybe. But then again, maybe not.

No

Says the consumate team player **Roger Burchill**

The world is what you make of it, and that goes for the online gaming world as well.

Yes, Scott, quality co-op does exist. It just isn't found in the drop-in/drop-out deathmatch mosh pits that you frequent. As with any good relationship, team building requires work. It requires an occasional look up from the down-sight to see who's contributing to the cause instead of ravenously racking up cheap kills. It's taking the initiative and communicating with like-minded gamers and adding them to a friend's list—maybe *gasp* even forming your own clan.

The payoff for all this effort is transcendent gameplay; a melding of skill, precision, and selflessness. Nothing equals the sense of achievement imparted by a team working in perfect cohesion—and the satisfaction of a well-oiled killing machine clearing levels of the very smack-talking, hyper-competitive meatheads you complain about.

Developers are doing their part to encourage team play—take *Killzone 3's* objective-oriented Operations mode, for example—but gamers bear the responsibility of making the most of the tools they're provided with for their online playgrounds. Settle for a wham-blam-thank-you-ma'am multiplayer experience, that's all we'll ever get. Work toward something more meaningful and it could be the start of a beautiful friendship.

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*See specially marked packages.
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SONY PICTURES HOME ENTERTAINMENT

PlayStation®
The Official Magazine

Previews

Quick Pitch

Twisted
Twisted Metal's creator has always described the car combat series as *Mortal Kombat* on wheels.

Crash-tastic
The franchise makes its first foray into online multiplayer with 16-player action.

Soaring?
There's a new flying vehicle waiting to be piloted here. Twisted, and lovely.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **October** Pub **SCEA** Dev **Eat Sleep Play**

Twisted Metal

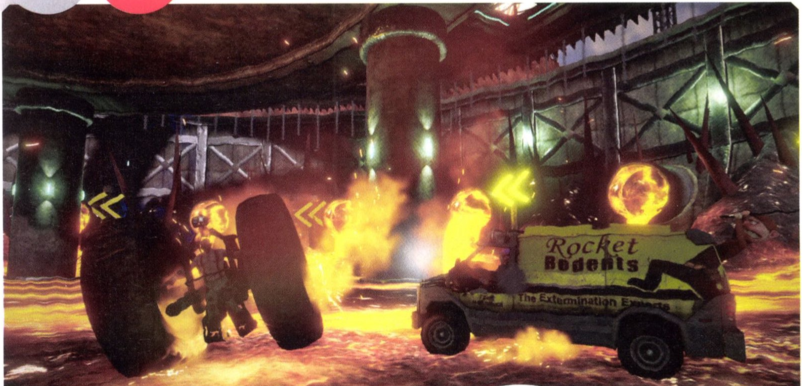
Big wheels keep on burnin'

As series creator David Jaffe is fond of pointing out, the car-combat opus *Twisted Metal* is Sony's longest-running PlayStation franchise, starting on PSone and spanning more than 15 years across home- and portable consoles. This year, the series will make the ambitious jump onto PS3 for the first time. The new *Metal* feels like a mix of old and new styles of gameplay: fighting games such as the *Street Fighter* and *Mortal Kombat* series, as well as top-tier first-person shooters are cited as inspirations in creating what Jaffe and his team hope will be the next big thing in online gaming.

Of course, *Metal* is nothing without its deadly vehicles, and the developer had plenty to show off in this regard. The biggest introduction came for Juggernaut, a massive, heavily armored but extremely slow tractor-trailer. Deft cooperation allows teammates to enter the truck and into its reinforced bed ("*Spy Hunter* or *Knight Rider* style," says Jaffe), with two players manning mounted turrets, turning the vehicle into hell on wheels. The game is full of finely tuned risk/reward scenarios; here, the risk is that when the doors are left open for entry, the truck is highly vulnerable to enemy fire. Juggernaut is also capable of deploying enormous spiked balls from its trailer, which can prove destructive for any vehicles unlucky enough to stray into its path.

Talon is the *Metal* series' first-ever flying vehicle, and as such adds some interesting new dynamics to the multiplayer experience. Featuring a giant magnet fitted to a chain dangling precariously from the undercarriage of the cockpit, Talon is able to lift other vehicles clean off the ground. Grab an enemy and drop him from a high elevation, and it's an instant kill. When playing cooperatively, we can use this mechanic to quickly pull a teammate from immediate danger, a tactic that is particularly useful in multiplayer capture-the-flag scenarios.

Axel, the two-wheeled vehicle familiar to fans of the series, unveiled ▸▸



Car combatants Axel and Vermin work up an appetite for destruction.

a new attack called Warwheel, in which its wheels compact together to form a protective shell firing deadly, car-piercing spikes. "It's [like] a violent Oreo cookie," says Jaffe.

On the smallest end of the spectrum is Reaper, a motorcycle with a bazooka, a propane bomb launcher, and a flaming chainsaw. We'll also be able to cruise the violent pathways with an exterminator's van in Vermin and the Ecto-1 doppleganger Meat Wagon, as well as a complement of ultra-destructive vehicles including muscle cars and trucks.

Vehicles in *Metal* have always had a personality, and this concept is being carried forward and expanded upon for this newest iteration. Beyond every car having its own special moves and handling, each now has its own ammo-carrying capacity based on size, with energy and turbo power draining at different speeds. An electromagnetic pulse blaster comes standard on our new or pre-owned vehicle, as do shields and mines.

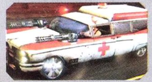
Nuclear Option

These vehicles come to life in *Twisted Metal's* new-and-improved Nuke mode. Where it had previously been shown to involve both teams competing simultaneously to capture the other's faction leader, Nuke rounds are now split into innings; teams take turns defending a particular landmark (some moving, some stationary), while the other is tasked with using a nuclear bomb to destroy it. Rather than merely grabbing a flag, we must capture and hold human hostages, return them to our team's missile launcher site, and survive long enough to sacrifice them. At its core (no pun intended), Nuke is modeled on baseball.

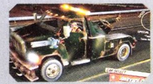
"Nuke is our most tactical game mode," says co-producer Chad Cox. "It really adds another layer to *Twisted Metal* multiplayer...like a twisted version of capture the flag." Some team members might choose to play

We're waiting for the Twisted Metal Insane Clown Posse's theory on magnetism.

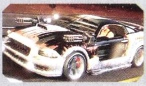
The Metal of Twisted Metal



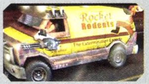
Meat Wagon
Part ambulance, part hearse; recalling *Ghostbusters'* Ecto-1.



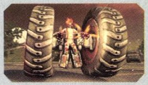
Junkyard Dog
This tow truck can launch taxis as its special attack.



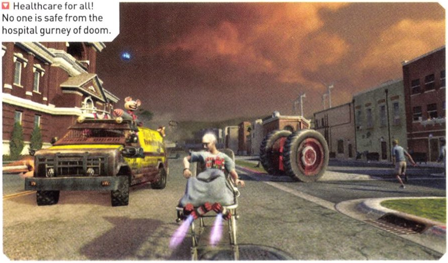
Death Warrant
A muscle car that can launch a ream of "blood missiles."



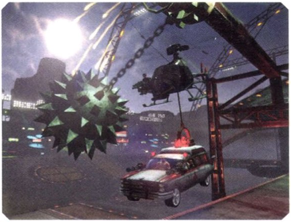
Vermin
Has a mounted missile that can be deployed and controlled remotely.



Axel
Like a tobacco grinder, but even more deadly.



Healthcare for all! No one is safe from the hospital gurney of doom.



The Talon is *Twisted Metal's* first flying vehicle. It can lift enemy vehicles in the air, causing them great harm, or it can whisk an ally to safety.

We shot a missile in the air. It fell to Earth on some sucker's head, and merriment (ours, not his, of course) ensued.

Remember when Fonzie jumped the shark? This is nothing like that. Not at all.

"Nuke [mode] is like a twisted version of capture the flag." *–Chad Cox, co-producer*

goalie and defend the base of the statue, while others patrol the battlefield looking for danger. In one of the mode's more enjoyable moments, the offensive team can capture the poor sap guarding the landmark and fasten him to a rocket launcher triggering the massive nuclear explosion. "We wanted to bring a mode into play that really allowed guys to bring their buddies online, use headsets, build parties, build clans, get down to which cars you bring in before you jump into the mode," says Jaffe.

None More Twisted

Three arenas were on display as well. The game's Black Rock Stadium level brings environmental obstacles such as lava pits to the fray, with a design that transforms during the course of a battle. Doors open, platforms raise, and power-ups scatter in this vastly expanded homage to *Twisted Metal 2's* fan-favorite Suicide Slide map. Also intriguing was Harbor City, a busy urban grid dotted with oil refineries, tanks, and a vast underground canal running the length of the map.

Our first extended hands-on with the game proved highly entertaining. Ranging from motorcycle to semi, characters are distinct in terms of both handling and weaponry, but still feel balanced. Steering will definitely feel familiar to fans of the series, benefiting from the game's classic hand-braking donuts and frequent use of turbo. The action is fast and intense, employing the speed of the fighting game with the scope and constructs of the first-person shooter. While nothing new was revealed of its single-player campaign, Jaffe and his team recently wrapped three weeks of shooting the game's live-action cutscenes, with which Jaffe notes he is exceedingly happy.

Mettle and *Metal* will certainly be tested come October 4 when these mechanical marvels and their destructive arsenals take to the highways and arenas for car combat—exclusively on PS3. EVAN SHAMOON

Dev Talk

"We've always thought of *Twisted Metal* as a fighting game with cars. *Mortal Kombat* meets *Unreal Tournament* has always been a log-line of ours."

David Jaffe
Series creator

Quick Pitch

Irrational

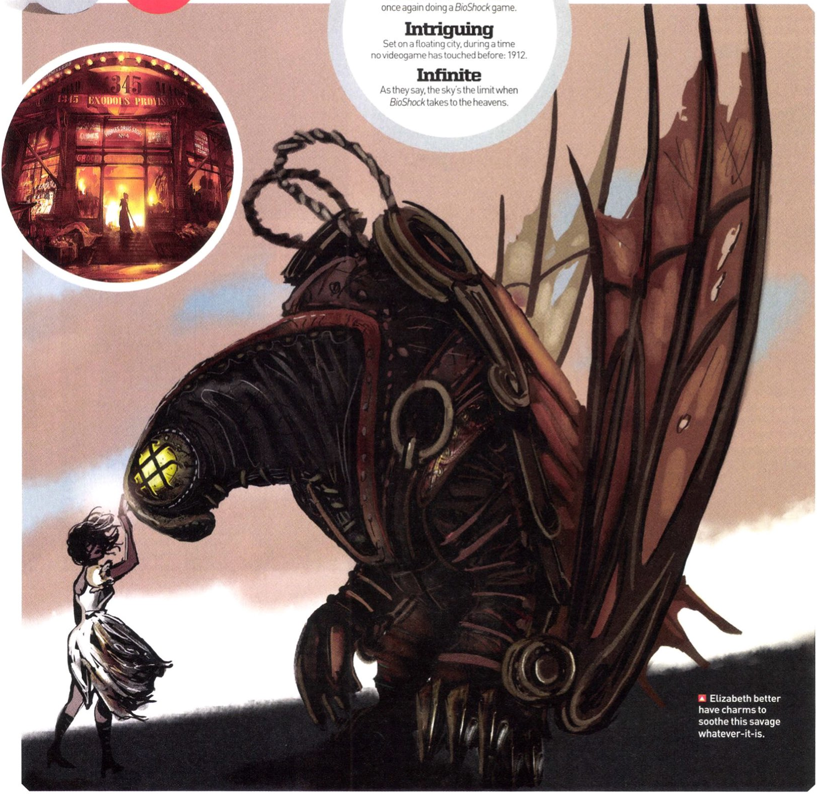
Ken Levine's Irrational Games is once again doing a *BioShock* game.

Intriguing

Set on a floating city, during a time no videogame has touched before: 1912.

Infinite

As they say, the sky's the limit when *BioShock* takes to the heavens.



Elizabeth better have charms to soothe this savage whatever-it-is.

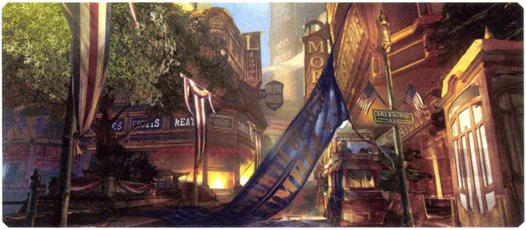
America, the beautiful The United States in 1912

Woodrow Wilson became president, Theodore Roosevelt gave a speech after being shot, the Girl Scouts were founded, and New Mexico gained statehood.

UPDATE Format **PS3** ETA **2012** Pub **2K Games** Dev **Irrational Games**

BioShock Infinite

Terror at 20,000 feet



Is Columbia a precursor to Rapture? Ken Levine is not saying.

There's the cautionary tale of Icarus and Daedalus, but Greeks with waxed wings be damned: Irrational Games plans to soar. The company has turned its focus to 1912, and to the floating fortress, Columbia, the setting for its anticipated first-person shooter *BioShock: Infinite*.

Originally built as what Irrational Games' president Ken Levine calls a "floating diplomat," Columbia was an arm of the U.S. government until the views of the government and Columbia clashed, causing the floating city to secede from the union, and disappear into the clouds.

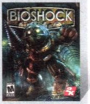
As Pinkerton agent Booker DeWitt, we'll find Columbia, explore it, and become enmeshed in its civil war as we struggle to rescue a young woman, Elizabeth. "One thing that's really interesting in *Infinite*, compared to *BioShock*," says Levine , "is when you get to [*BioShock's*] Rapture the war is sort of over. In Columbia that's not the case. You're coming in and the matter is still quite undecided and you're going to be dealing with both groups: the Founders, the primary power in the city, and the Vox Populi, an internationalist workers' movement who are in opposition and have a very different viewpoint on what the role of the city of Columbia is."

This will entail a lot of shooting, with DeWitt and Elizabeth working together to escape Columbia. In addition to an expanded arsenal of projectile- and melee-based weapons, DeWitt will be able to augment himself with vigors and nostrums, a throwback to late 19th-, early 20th-century medicinal shows. Elizabeth, too, has her own suite of powers; she's been shown hurling rainclouds to bolster her ally's electrical attacks, and while the full extent of her abilities is unknown, Levine describes them as earth shattering.

DeWitt and Elizabeth's relationship will grow over the course of *Infinite*, but we won't need to yank our hair out trying to protect our charge. "There is no way, shape, or form in which she is somebody you need to protect, or escort, or watch her health," says Levine. "That's something we decided right at the outset that is never fun and we don't want to do it."

Instead, the relationship will have a moral component to it, and DeWitt's actions will have weight. "What games don't portray are relationships that are formed in sort of a crucible of pain," he says. "Their relationship is definitely forged in the fire and it is forged in their actions and how they sacrifice for each other and it's forged in the choices they make. I think people are going to be very interested to see how this relationship evolves." GREG ORLANDO

Can't Wait? Play these



BioShock
(PS3, 2008)
Our introduction to the undersea city of Rapture and a gamechanger for the FPS genre.

BioShock 2
(PS3, 2010)
Not quite as groundbreaking, but arguably better than the original.

Could Be a Contender

Shadows of the Damned

Hell and damnation and boners

The premise

The brochure plugging hell lied to us. But we're going in anyway to rescue our true love, and all we have to keep us safe is a talking torch/demonic weapon/companion named Johnson.

The reality

We'll fight a war of light versus darkness in the third-person perspective, battling against a host of creepy demons, some of which are a little too fond of opera for our tastes.

The hook

The game is as stylish and unsettling as it is goofy. In *Shadows of the Damned* we guzzle alcohol to restore health and collect demonic parts to fuel our weapons, the Teether and the Boner. And yes, they shoot teeth and bones, respectively.

The chances

The popular phrase, "Not a chance in hell," does not apply here.

A masked man will appear and change Ryu Hayabusa, says Team Ninja.

Quick Pitch

Unmasked

Ryu Hayabusa will be showing a more personal, more intimate, side of himself.

Violent

Ninja Gaiden 3 aims to bring a new level of intensity to its hacking and slashing.

Multiplayer

There are plans to introduce a competitive multiplayer element. Let the decapitations commence.

FIRST LOOK Format **PS3** ETA **TBD** Pub **Tecmo KOEI** Dev **Team Ninja**

Ninja Gaiden 3

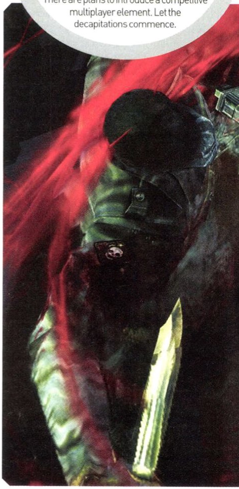
Wax on, mask off...

Yosuke Hayashi, leader of Team Ninja, has some bad news regarding *Ninja Gaiden 3*. "Due to the fact that we wanted to flesh out the story," he says, "we eliminated the 'buying' system because of the fact that killing someone to get orbs to unlock something did not really fit into what we are trying to portray here. That's why I unfortunately have to say that the old man Muramasa has gone into retirement."

This is a new *Ninja Gaiden*. Instead of a kindly shopkeeper, the game allows for protagonist Ryu Hayabusa's weapons to change naturally as the story progresses. And although there will be plenty of blood-soaked action, the developers at Team Ninja are also placing emphasis on Hayabusa's tale, emphasizing the ninja's human side.

Hayashi also claims this new installment will make the violence more real."There are so many games out there these days that let you kill someone and you have probably seen and played them all by now," he says. "We wanted to do something different with *Ninja Gaiden*. We wanted to make the kill more personal: What would you feel if you were next to someone, so close that you could hear their heart beat and feel them breathe as you are taking their life? And what would it feel like if you were to lodge a sword into their body and feel it cut through their bones, as you watch your enemy scream in pain and fight for their life in front of your very eyes? We wanted to accentuate this personal side of killing someone and especially using a sword to cut through someone's body and bone."

Most intriguingly, Hayashi promises a multiplayer mode offering head-to-head combat, and suggests *Gaiden 3* may feature Move support. "We want to bring out the best parts of the Move in this game." GREG ORLANDO



Ninjastic

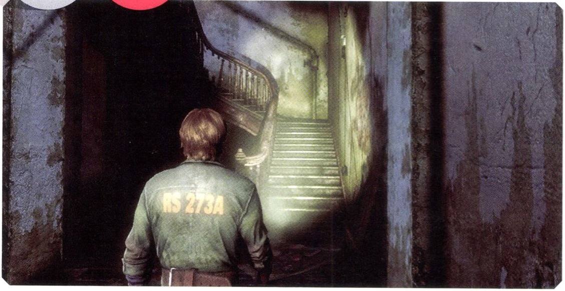
Donatello
Famous for: Turtle power, and heroism on the half-shell. He's the uber-smart tech geek.

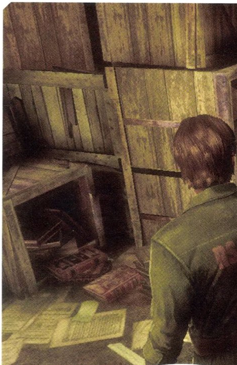
The Master
Famous for: One pretty bad '80s TV show, titled, oddly, *The Master*.

Ryu Hayabusa
Famous for: Kicking ass in *Ninja Gaiden* and *Dead or Alive* games.

More good news: Team Ninja is working tirelessly to fix all camera issues.

Fun Fact: The prototype version of the game featured zombie enemies.





FIRST LOOK Format **PS3** ETA **October** Pub **Konami** Dev **Vatra Games**

Silent Hill Downpour

Horror, reign o'er me

This may be one of the rare times someone would prefer to stay incarcerated. Murphy Pendleton, convict, transferred from one maximum-security facility to another, sees his prison bus wrecked, and his life completely ruined... Silent Hill seems to be the nearest town.

What awaits, of course, in this third-person survival horror game is the stuff of nightmares. Devin Shatsky, the game's producer, says *Silent Hill: Downpour* will focus itself on the previously unexplored southeastern portion of the city—a storm-drenched collection of fog-soaked, monster-laden environments.

The developers describe Pendleton as a protagonist with some pretty deep issues. "With Murphy, there's a bit of a twist," says the game's senior associate producer Tom Hulett. "He's spent the last several years of his life on a schedule not his own and now he's dropped here in this horrific place. It is a chance at freedom? Or just a screwed-up twist on doing time?"

As the game's subtitle suggests, rain will play a big part in the proceedings, with a storm's intensity tied directly to the threat Pendleton faces at the moment. "The player will need to learn when and where they can go to hide from the weather. But people shouldn't misinterpret this to mean when the rain stops, they're going to be totally safe; that isn't the case."

The developers have also placed their emphasis on reworking *Silent Hill's* weapon- and combat mechanics and its inventory system. "We've tried to up the level of realism," says Shatsky, "so that Murphy doesn't have an imaginary invisible pocket that can hold automatic weapons, medical equipment, television sets, etc. Basically Murphy can hold an object or weapon in his hand and holster a firearm in his waistband and that's it." Further, Murphy will need to be constantly looking for new weapons, too. In *Downpour*, all weapons are breakable, and this should add to the game's persistent tension.

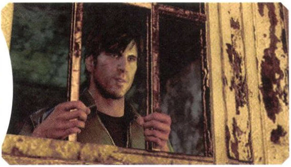
If Pendleton wants out of Silent Hill, he'll need to discover his fight-or-flight reflex not too long before the arrival of All Hallows' Eve. GREG ORLANDO

Silent, but deadly, Hills

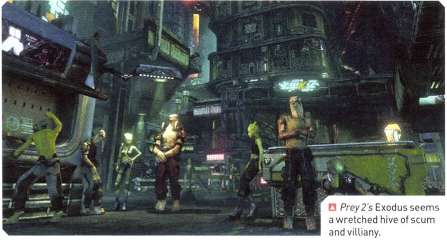
Silent Hill 2 (PS2, 2001)
James Sunderland came to Silent Hill looking for his deceased wife. In technical terms, this is known as one dumb-ass move. (Trust us, James, there's plenty more fish in the sea.) A masterwork of unease and dread, this was perhaps the *Silent Hill* series' finest entry and marked the first appearance of the creepy boss Pyramid Head whose head was, in fact, pyramidal.

Silent Hill 4: The Room (PS2, 2004)
An interesting experiment, *Silent Hill 4: The Room* introduced the first-person perspective in some of its key sequences. It also had a protagonist, Henry, who was largely confined to his apartment room, and could only travel to Silent Hill via portals. Ultimately, though innovative, the game was flawed; its escort missions were terrible and its near-unkillable enemies frustrating.

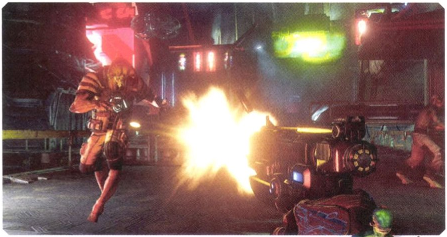
Silent Hill does have an excellent corpse to crate ratio. It's stellar, really.



Murphy Pendelton knows about iron bars. He also knows about not dropping the soap in the shower and fashioning shivs from common household items.



Prey 2's Exodus seems a wretched hive of scum and villiany.



UPDATE Format **PS3** ETA **2012** Pub **Bethesda Softworks** Dev **Human Head**

Prey 2

Back on the hunt

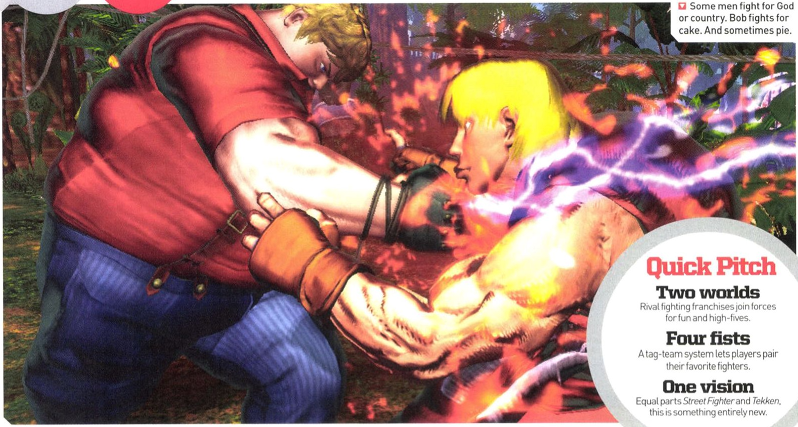
Forget the original *Prey*. The 2006 critically acclaimed shooter for Xbox 360 and PC bears little resemblance to its sequel. But that's intentional.

"What can we do in order to explore other parts of the *Prey* universe?" asks Human Head Studios co-founder and project lead Chris Rhinehart. "One of the things that was the core of *Prey* was that we took the player to a new place that they hadn't really been to before, and let them experience new gameplay mechanics that they had never seen before in a first-person shooter."

What, exactly, does that mean? A new protagonist who, this time, is the predator. Killian Samuels is a bounty hunter on the alien planet Exodus, replacing *Prey's* Native American hero Domasi "Tommy" Tawodi, who was prey to cybernetic aliens.

Killian comes complete with new moves that fit well with the new game's "alien noir" vibe. In order to traverse the open-world cyberpunk setting, the bounty hunter has an updated movement and cover system, allowing for high-octane chases across a dark, futuristic city that could be *Blade Runner's* dystopian Los Angeles or the seedy entertainment district in *Star Wars'* Coruscant. Killian will also have access to about 20 gadgets and weapons with more than 40 upgrades (including an anti-gravity gun and a *Batman: Arkham Asylum*-like DNA scanner), and abilities allowing him to traverse the environment rapidly and vertically, reminiscent of parkour powerhouse *Mirror's Edge*.

Plot details remain hazy—we still don't know anything about Killian's backstory—but we do know we'll have some moral choices throughout the game (like the option to help or rob a character to earn money), though we'll ultimately garner the same ending no matter how we play. TRACEY JOHN



Some men fight for God or country. Bob fights for cake. And sometimes pie.

Quick Pitch

Two worlds
Rival fighting franchises join forces for fun and high-fives.

Four fists
A tag-team system lets players pair their favorite fighters.

One vision
Equal parts *Street Fighter* and *Tekken*, this is something entirely new.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **Spring 2012** Pub **Capcom** Dev **Capcom**

Street Fighter X Tekken

Tekken it to the streets

Roster

Street Fighter
Ryu
Ken
Chun-Li
Guile
Abel

Tekken
Kazuya
Nina
King
Marduk
Bob

It almost felt like we were getting trolled, didn't it? A game joining two rival fighting franchises? Impossible! Yet here we are, less than a year after its surprise unveiling, and we're listening to Capcom producer and *Street Fighter* master-mind Yoshinori Ono introduce a playable build. "The goal here was not to shoehorn *Tekken* characters into a *Street Fighter* game or *Street Fighter* characters into a *Tekken* game," Ono emphasizes. "Basically, it's a new sort of game that doesn't borrow too heavily from one side or the other."

Superficially, the improbable *Street Fighter X Tekken* does bear a striking resemblance to *Super Street Fighter IV*. The art style, character models, and animations closely mirror those of Capcom's recent fighting phenomenon, as do the game's most basic mechanics: 3D characters fight on a 2D plane while players mash out projectiles attacks and supers combos on six buttons (all of which defies *Tekken* tradition).

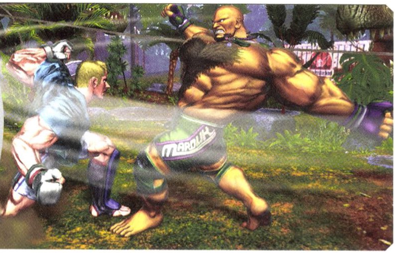
Beyond this understandable family resemblance, however, there's a great deal of nuance separating *Street Fighter X Tekken* from all other Capcom fighting games. Sure we've still got fireballs and dragon punches, but we can also bounce players off the ground and into juggle combos—a staple of the *Tekken* style. The game even includes many classic *Tekken* combos that should be deeply engrained in the thumbs of longtime fans. "It's there as kind of a welcome mat to invite people who traditionally have only played *Tekken*," Ono explains during our demo.

Twin Dragons

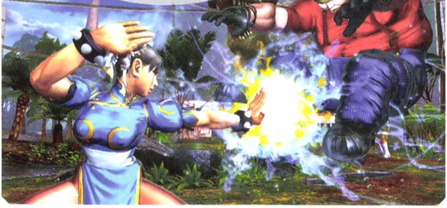
Even without those combos, there's a middle ground here any fighting fan should find, well, pretty darn intriguing. The game seems to tone down *Street Fighter's* focus on projectiles and supers while placing more emphasis on launcher moves and juggling. It's as if the *Tekken* mentality has been layered on top of a strong *Street Fighter* foundation, and the result is something else entirely.

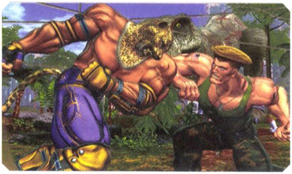
Super Street Fighter IV's Focus attacks are out, but EX specials and Ultra combos are not only present, but also bigger and crazier than before—though only one special meter occupies the bottom of the screen. The pace seems faster than *SSFIV* as well, though not nearly as fast as Capcom's other major fighting-game franchise, *Marvel vs. Capcom*. Interestingly, we didn't notice any *Tekken* characters use projectile attacks during our hands-on time, but according to Ono, certain features are not yet finalized. This could well be one of them.

The most surprising and distinctive



▲ It's odd none of the *Tekken* fighters have been shown hurling projectiles. This may be a feature added at a later date.





> "It's an over-the-top, party-in-a-box kind of game." *–Yoshinori Ono, Lead Producer*

facet of *X Tekken* is its two-character tag system, which deliberately resembles the format found in *Tekken Tag Tournament*. Though our second fighter can be tagged in at any time, only one character needs to be knocked out for the round to end, and tagged-out fighters do not regain health as they do in *Marvel vs. Capcom 3* (though this too may be tweaked before the game's release).

In This Corner

The biggest variable left unaccounted for is the roster. Though the first five fighters from each franchise have been announced (see sidebar), there are plenty more on the way. "We actually want to try and find characters that are the least likely to show up in a *Street Fighter* game otherwise," says Ono. "Ones that Capcom would not be able to think of on their own and that perform moves that we wouldn't normally have in our games."

Regardless of who ends up in the final game, our hands-on time so far convinced us this crazy idea just might work. Seeing these iconic characters together and performing these familiar moves on each other was as surreal as it was delightful. "It's an over-the-top, party-in-a-box kind of game," enthuses Ono. "It has a very specific purpose—which is to get a lot of people to maintain their interest in fighting games—and it should offer a lot of things that you couldn't find elsewhere." He's definitely right about that—how many games let Ryu dragon punch Nina Williams in front of a T. rex? SCOTT BUTTERWORTH

Dev Talk

"The way the deal is structured, [Namco] has no say in what we're making, and we have no say in what they're making. You guys probably have more information right now than they do at Namco."
Yoshinori Ono
Lead Producer

Street Fighter X everything Other options for crazy crossovers

Here are a few of the other fighting franchises we'd love to see collide with the world of *Street Fighter*: *BlazBlue*, *Dead or Alive*, *God of War*, *Killer Instinct*, and *SoulCalibur*.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **Holiday** Pub **Capcom** Dev **Slant Six**

Resident Evil Operation Raccoon City

A deathmatch made in heaven...or hell

Competitive multiplayer is business as usual in *Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City*: Players select one of four distinct character classes then square off against an opposing team, gaining points for kills, headshots, and so on until one team reaches the score limit. The twist, then, is that the two opposing forces aren't the only competitors. Instead, it's Umbrella Security Service versus U.S. Special Ops...versus zombies.

The zombies, of course, are free agents—they'll attack anything in their periphery so long as it has a brain. Their presence alone radically alters the game dynamic. During our hands-on session, we would often lower our gun after aiming to discover we were surrounded by the undead. Thankfully, *Raccoon City's* single-button melee system let us escape with some flashy kung-fu acrobatics (a welcome combat system for a shooter), but it always left us unbalanced and vulnerable to enemy attack. Survival is by no means guaranteed.

Still, few things in life are as satisfying as standing back and watching as our panicked opponents are slowly devoured by zombies...except maybe using a zombie as a "human" shield or tagging an enemy with a non-lethal shot so his blood attracts all the nearby undead—or anything else that turns zombies into a useful gameplay device rather than simple bullet fodder. They may want to eat our brains, but ultimately, we're still happy to have them around. SCOTT BUTTERWORTH

Class War
The four character classes—Recon, Medic, Surveillance, and Heavy Weapons—offer distinctly different playstyles. Recon, for instance, moves significantly faster than Medic, while Heavy Weapons, as one might expect, seemed to absorb more damage.

Are You Experienced?
We didn't notice any kind of experience or upgrade systems in place during our hands-on time, but that doesn't mean there won't be any in the final product.

Super Powers
Each class also offers nine different abilities (such as an adrenaline shot for Medics and a cloaking device for Surveillance) and 12 firearms. Players only get one of each, but that leaves enough combinations to keep enemies guessing.

Run and Gun
The shooter mechanics are a departure from *Resident Evil* tradition. Players can move while aiming (a series first), hard-lock to cover, regenerate health, and even blind fire.

Know the Score
Raccoon City's Team Attack mode relies on points not kills when determining the victor. While basic kills are worth five points, teams can earn even more by drawing zombies to their opponents and killing special monsters, like Hunters, that appear later on.

Know your enemies Meet Raccoon City's creeps and creatures

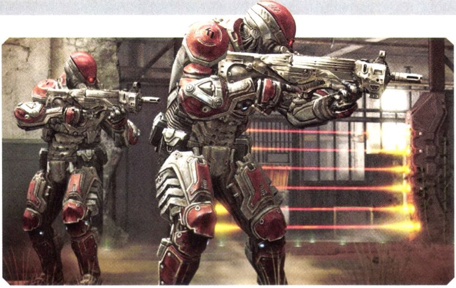
Zombies
Who wants some brains?

Hunters
Not to be trifled with.

Tyrants
No tyrant is a good tyrant.

Spec Ops soldiers
Saving the day with bullets.

Leon Kennedy
Leon knows his undead.



The vast expanse of post-apocalyptic hell is no place for a Sunday picnic.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **September** Pub **Bethesda Softworks** Dev **id Software**

Rage

Drive angry online

The upcoming post-apocalyptic shooter *Rage* strays from developer id Software's corridor-crawling comfort zone. From its vehicular combat to its sun-soaked outdoor environments, there's no confusing it with the dark, claustrophobic *Doom III*. Despite this departure, *Rage's* online modes must include some buddy massacring, right? Sorry, but if we want to fill friends full of slugs, we had best stick to *Call of Duty's* frontlines, because id's not having it. That said, *Rage's* take on multiplayer seems a welcome change of pace.

Legends of the Wasteland, an online- and local cooperative mode, pairs players for stand-alone, backstory-supporting levels. While the eight Legends don't affect the critical campaign, they do reference it in narrative-expanding ways. Within the course of the main game, players may hear a fireside story of famous bounty hunters tracking a notorious target; then, in a separate cooperative mission, they could find themselves in the boots of one of these guns-for-hire, hunting down the infamous mark.

Of course, not all of *Rage's* online offerings involve getting cozy with pals. Closer to a classic kill-friends-for-fun mode is Rage Combat Rally, a competitive challenge featuring the title's dirt-kicking dune buggies. Supporting up to six players on five maps, the mode sees participants racing, capturing rally points, and trying to reduce each other to roadkill. We look forward to running our friends off the road when *Rage* arrives in September. MATT CABRAL

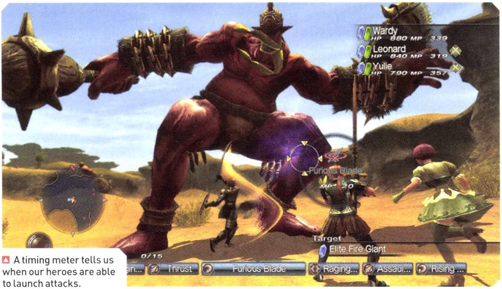
Getting Wasted

What's up in the wasteland

Show Blitz
A kill-or-be-killed run through *Rage's* *Running Man*-like, freak-infested game show, Mutant Bash TV, will be among the challenges faced in co-op.

Home Turf
Both of *Rage's* online modes take place in familiar environments based on the single-player campaign's mutant-crawling settings.

Car Wars
Players need to keep their heads cool and reflexes quick in Rage Combat Rally. Making sure the hood-mounted cannons are always loaded won't hurt either.



A timing meter tells us when our heroes are able to launch attacks.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **August** Pub **D3Publisher** Dev **Level-5**

White Knight Chronicles II

Blinded by the white

This action RPG packages two *White Knight Chronicles* titles in one, and we may choose to start from the original game and play through its sequel, import a save file, or begin playing *Chronicles II* from level 35. We'll get to whack monsters, form six-man parties and select tactics for our allies, transform into powerful white knights, improve our character's active and passive skills, and then go online on PSN with up to five of our friends. GREG ORLANDO

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **November** Pub **SCEA** Dev **Naughty Dog**

Uncharted 3

Drake's Deception

Naughty Dog unveils Uncharted 3's expanded multiplayer

With the success of *Uncharted 2's* competitive multiplayer action, it should come as no surprise that *Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception* will continue apace. What we didn't expect was the hearty bonus of splitscreen play, which will allow for multiple PSN IDs to be signed in simultaneously. Because let's face it: sofa gaming is sofa king fun.

Deception also introduces the buddy system. When paired with a buddy in, for example, the game's new three-team deathmatch mode (a six-player, three-teams-of-two affair), we can earn extra cash by performing particular actions during matches. These will include high-fiving and cooperatively taking down an enemy, among others; all of the moves, including the brash high-five, come with their own degree of risk.

This time around, we'll be able to fully customize our characters, outfitting both heroes and villains with hundreds of unique parts, ranging from shirts and pants to our perennial staff favorite, hats. Weapon loadouts can be customized as well, including primary and secondary guns, two booster slots, and one medal kickback slot, along with weapon modifications that can be added to guns.

We were also shown three multiplayer stages, the most impressive of which was Airstrip. Demonstrating Naughty Dog's attempt to bring Hollywood-style set pieces to the multiplayer action, we were split between an open cargo airplane speeding down a runway and several military trucks following it. We can attempt to jump from one moving truck to the next, working toward the open bay of the plane, but don't expect it to be easy; the plane closes up and takes off, but the stage continues amid airstrip warehouses and hangars.

One new multiplayer element worth noting is something Naughty Dog is calling Power Play. Functioning as something of a competitive "rubber band" to keep matches closer, events arise throughout a match that afford

Quick Pitch

Charted
Uncharted 3's multiplayer allows us to team up and go shooting.

Customizable
We can fully deck out our characters in any way we choose.

Pair apparent
Our cooperative play will earn us big rewards.

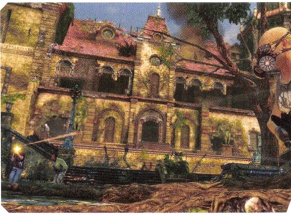
For The Win

Uncharted 3's rocky road to victory

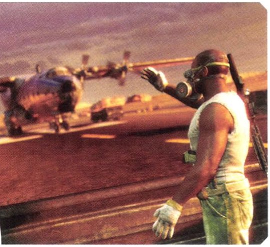
Overtime
If a multiplayer match is too close to call, players will be thrust into a minute-long overtime period.

Sudden Death
If the overtime ends in a tie, Sudden Death settles things once and for all.

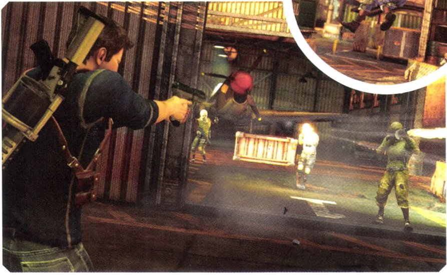
Humiliation
Facebook and YouTube integration mean that matches can be shared with the outside world.



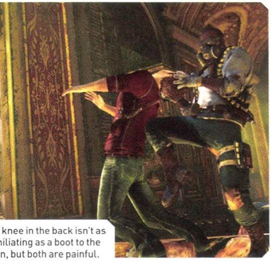
Characters can be customized with all sorts of acoutrements, like the always fashionable sleeveless T.



They won't be serving peanuts or complimentary beverages, but rather death on this non-stop flight.



Airstrip lets us fight in a series of airplane hangars. We can also board a moving plane.



A knee in the back isn't as humiliating as a boot to the groin, but both are painful.

the losing team an opportunity to earn more kills and thereby close the score gap (the Elimination event, for instance, prevents the opposing team from respawning immediately). While we're assured this won't allow a bunch of neophytes to overpower seasoned veterans, the developer's aim is to make matches fun for more people, more often.

While Naughty Dog is keeping other modes and details under its belt, we can expect plenty of new touches, including additional taunts, melee attacks during platforming, and improved environmental destruction; late-joining players will be able to seamlessly enter games in progress as well. *Deception* doesn't ship until November, but a multiplayer beta will go wide on July 5, with early access for PlayStation Plus subscribers and *inFamous 2* owners coming a week earlier on June 28. EVAN SHAMOON

Leaping Lanny was renamed "The Pancake" shortly after this shot.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **February 2012**
Pub **Namco Bandai** Dev **Saber Interactive**

Inversion

Oh what a feeling, when we're dancing on the ceiling

Pity the slaves wearing those explosive collars. They're charging and brandishing clubs, and they don't want to discuss the news of the day.

The Gravlink device we carry lets us make them weightless or incredibly heavy. In this case, the slaves collapse under their own weight, and we can pause to conduct an internal debate as to what to do with them. Instead, and in the time-honored tradition handed down to us by such games as *Castle Wolfenstein* and *Killzone*, we take gun in hand and start blasting.

The third-person shooter *Inversion* is still months away from stores, but it seems to have found a bloody groove to ride to completion. A playable version pits us, as protagonist Davis Russell, against a horde of villainous, gravity-manipulating aliens.

We'll be called upon to do terrible, horrible, yet entertaining stuff such as lift enemies in the air with our Gravlink, yank them toward us, and then perform a brutal, body-exploding fatality move. Or we can shoot out a building's supports and watch our foes get crushed by tons of concrete. With gravity as our ally, we'll be able to fight on ceilings and the sides of buildings, too.

Sad but true: We are disheartened by the thrill of taking a floating, flammable lava- or gas-blob and hucking it at a nearby alien Lutadore, or making a foe on a rope bridge so heavy he breaks through wooden planks to meet his death on the unyielding ground below. What we do, we are certainly not proud of, but *Inversion* at least makes the going worth the ride. **GREG ORLANDO**

Davis Russell is a husband, father, and former cop. He's lost his wife and seen his daughter captured. It's time for revenge.

This is the Gravlink, a device that allows Russell to manipulate gravity. It's a powerful tool in his war.

With the Gravlink, Russell can make objects float or turn them super-dense. Both low- and high-G can be used to great effect.

Russell can carry two guns at once, and he'll have access to a complement of machine guns, rifles, and shotguns.

Gravity plays a big part in *Inversion*. As its title suggests, Russell will be walking—and fighting—on ceilings and walls.

Getting Inverted A guide to gravity gone wrong

In addition to fighting alien Lutadores, Davis Russell and his companions will have to battle their explosive-collar wearing slaves. Oh, and what Russell does to his enemies with gravity can be done to him in return.

We can pick up huge concrete barricades and strategically place them for cover.

Floating enemies can be easily dispatched, but Russell can be made weightless, too.

Making slaves super heavy allows us time to carefully evaluate our surroundings.

Squad commands are limited to Go, Help, and Come, but the A.I. provides a more sophisticated form of assistance.

Smaller enemies (and even teammates) can be grabbed and tossed. Need hydra bait? Throw a goblin!

Basic attacks rely on the standard two-button, combo-based melee system, though each weapon also has unique special attacks.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **Spring 2012** Pub **Capcom** Dev **Capcom**

Dragon's Dogma

Grabbing boss battles by the scruff of the neck

While many oversized game bosses can only be defeated through quick-time events or scripted attack sequences, fantasy action game *Dragon's Dogma* let us get a little more, er, hands-on when we tangled with a massive griffin during a recent play session. Rather than forcing us to wait for bosses to expose a cheesy glowing weak spot, *Dogma* lets us grab hold of and even climb larger enemies, giving us the freedom to employee any number of different strategies.

During our first pass at the Griffin, for example, an A.I.-controlled squad member motioned for us to launch off his back in order to latch onto the creature as it soared overhead. After a few attempts, we managed to catch its talon and proceeded to scale its back as it careened through the air. Once we reached its head, we began to thrust our blade into its scalp until it unleashed a blood-curdling screech and slammed into the ground. There our mage buffed our daggers with fire, and we continued to hack away as the Griffin burst into writhing mass of flaming feathers.

Our second attempt, however, was much less eventful. As we cleared out a few pathetic goblins on the ground, the Griffin randomly dove to earth, giving us a nice opportunity to climb directly onto its back and simply hammer the heavy attack button until the beast died.

Unfortunately, this is tradeoff that may be inevitable with emergent gameplay: When it works, it's brilliant—but it doesn't always seem to work. Still, *Dogma's* grab system is an exciting prospect, and there's plenty we can do to ensure our Griffin battles run smoothly—such as selecting and customizing an appropriate team of warriors and heeding their advice during combat. Even if everything doesn't go as planned, there's some welcome gameplay potential here beyond the standard quick-time event.
SCOTT BUTTERWORTH

Revolution is a master class in intelligent level design. Every area quietly accommodates the entire range of playstyles.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **August** Pub **Square Enix** Dev **Eidos Montreal**

Deus Ex Human Revolution

From our cold, dead hands

It's a constant reminder of the divide between rich and poor, but in the world of *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*, cybernetic augmentation is a reality. And controversial though it may be, it's also a hell of a lot of fun.

We sat down with the first 10 hours of *Revolution*, and came away floored. The story kicks off quickly, immediately drawing players into its heavily *Blade Runner*-inspired world. Adam Jensen—ex-SWAT officer and current head of security for biotech mega-corporation Serif Industries—is working late on the eve of his company's finest hour. Through an engrossing conversation with Serif's star scientist (and Adam's former flame), we're introduced to characters and themes driving the game.

We're mostly made to listen and learn, but impatient players will be able to skip directly to Jensen tearing through the smoldering remains of the lab, searching for his former love only to discover a team of augmented mercenaries instead. One trip through a plate glass window later, Jensen's body is ruined. In come the involuntary, but lifesaving, augmentations.

Ubermensch

Six months after the incident, we're dropped into the game's first mission: defusing a hostage situation at a manufacturing plant that's been seized by anti-aug extremists. For our first playthrough, we took the stealth route, opting for a non-lethal tranquilizer rifle instead of a deadlier alternative. When played in this way, *Revolution* bears a striking resemblance to *Metal Gear Solid*—there's even a meter indicating enemies' level of awareness, from completely clueless to fully alert.

As in *Metal Gear*, we avoided enemies' line of sight and tried to not make noise while sneaking across large obstacle-ridden areas, each essentially a giant puzzle. The tension was fantastic. Waiting behind cover as a guard passed by just a few feet away before tapping the X button to silently dive across an exposed area was thrilling, and discovering a cleverly placed vent that allowed us to avoid a room full of enemy firepower felt like a triumph. Paired with the unlockable cloaking tool, stealth works brilliantly.

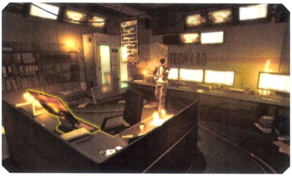
After completing the mission without being detected or killing a soul (netting us a hefty experience point bonus), we decided to try again with a little less... subtlety. Wielding an exhilaratingly overpowered revolver proved a blast: Everything from the massive gunshot sound effects to the collapsing bodies of our enemies made the shooting mechanic feel powerful and satisfying. It's also much more efficient than stealth, though we did earn less experience in the end.

Can't Wait? Play these

Fallout 3
(PS3, 2008)
Bruiser? Sniper? Charmer? Thief? However we want to play, we can build a set of skills to match in this stalwart western RPG.

Mass Effect 2
(PS3, 2011)
Perhaps the finest example of storytelling in gaming history, this stellar space opera lets us chat up the locals before shooting up a storm.

The story sets up a few obvious twists, but we don't yet know how much will play out and how much is meant to throw us off.



> "Wielding an exhilaratingly over-powered revolver proved a blast."

Real Talk

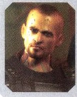
At the end of the hostage mission, we got our first taste of *Revolution's* conversation system as we tried to talk down a hostage taker. The game deftly managed to make both "good" and "evil" options feel valid and believable without violating the story's internal logic or betraying a character's personality. Jensen either comes off as a gruff soldier with a heart of gold or a cold, jaded badass who's been hardened by tragedy and directionless rage—but either way, it works. Most impressively, there's just enough nuance in the dialogue and the delivery to make us believe we can actually read the other character and choose the option that will eventually yield desirable results.

Aside from the dialogue trees, the game's role-playing elements are light and accessible. Inventory space must be managed and experience can be cashed in for new augmentations like increased strength, silent movement, and the ability to punch through certain walls. Disappointingly, the open-world sections seemed a bit spartan, serving more as between-mission hubs than living, breathing cities. We were able to pick up a few optional side-quests while strolling through the streets of Detroit, but it's a fry cry from *Grand Theft Auto's* Liberty City.

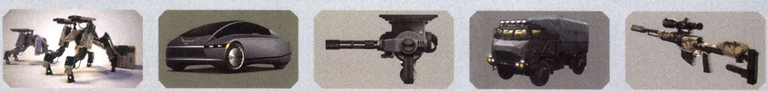
But the fact that *Revolution* hasn't delivered on our every expectation thus far is hardly a failing. All of the game's ambition may pay off and result in a grittier, more accessible *Mass Effect*. SCOTT BUTTERWORTH

Word Choice

Revolution doesn't have a measurable karma system, but our actions did have a noticeable impact on the way other characters treated us. The story didn't seem to branch as a result of our actions, but the dialogue did change.



Tech noir The gear and gadgets of the year 2027

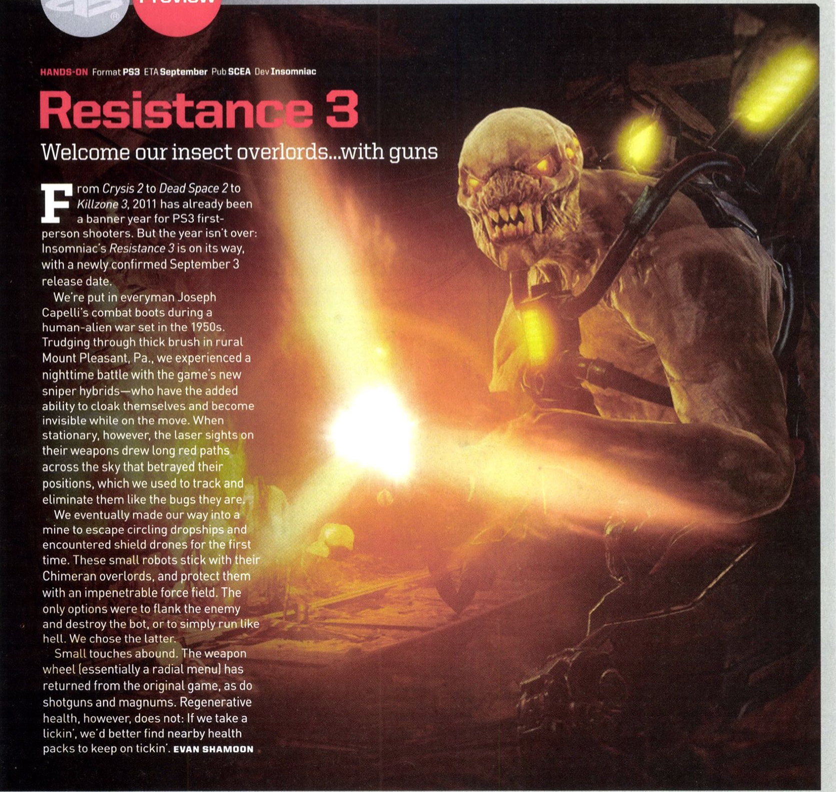


While the civilian sedan and military truck didn't come into play, we were forced to contend with touchy turrets and pissed-off mechs. Thank God for our tranquilizer rifle.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **September** Pub **SCEA** Dev **Insomniac**

Resistance 3

Welcome our insect overlords...with guns



From *Crysis 2* to *Dead Space 2* to *Killzone 3*, 2011 has already been a banner year for PS3 first-person shooters. But the year isn't over: Insomniac's *Resistance 3* is on its way, with a newly confirmed September 3 release date.

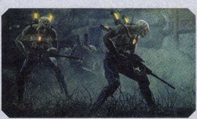
We're put in everyman Joseph Capelli's combat boots during a human-alien war set in the 1950s. Trudging through thick brush in rural Mount Pleasant, Pa., we experienced a nighttime battle with the game's new sniper hybrids—who have the added ability to cloak themselves and become invisible while on the move. When stationary, however, the laser sights on their weapons drew long red paths across the sky that betrayed their positions, which we used to track and eliminate them like the bugs they are.

We eventually made our way into a mine to escape circling dropships and encountered shield drones for the first time. These small robots stick with their Chimeran overlords, and protect them with an impenetrable force field. The only options were to flank the enemy and destroy the bot, or to simply run like hell. We chose the latter.

Small touches abound. The weapon wheel (essentially a radial menu) has returned from the original game, as do shotguns and magnums. Regenerative health, however, does not: If we take a lickin', we'd better find nearby health packs to keep on tickin'. **EVAN SHAMOON**

Online Resistance A brief look at the revised multiplayer

While *Resistance 3*'s main story is set in the United States, its multiplayer maps span the globe. We fought in an abandoned train yard in Colombia, and can also take part in African battles set in Chad's Fort Lamy.



We'll get to fight in 8-vs.-8 human-vs.-Chimera battles.

Both our online warrior and his weapons can be upgraded.

Competitive deathmatch modes are in. No word yet on cooperative play.

UPDATE Format **PS3** ETA **2012** Pub **Capcom** Dev **CyberConnect 2**

Asura's Wrath

A hero who must murder gods. Hmm...

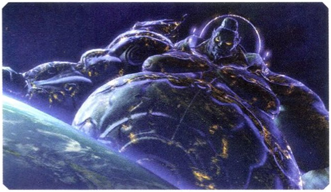
After being stripped of his demigod status, banished to earth, and having his daughter kidnapped, six-armed anti-hero Asura has understandably decided to channel his considerable rage towards vengeance. Vengeance and god slaying.

While we did catch a short glimpse of more traditional action game beat-'em-up sections with smaller enemies to wale on, *Asura's Wrath's* primary focus seems to be its epic, highly cinematic, and quick-time-event-heavy boss fights. And since each boss is presumably one of the gods that betrayed Asura, each battle is likely to contain just as much story as action.

During our demo, we watched Asura battle a glowing deity who somehow conjured a physical form larger than our entire planet. Though the arrogant celestial god spent most of the battle lording his immense power over the comparably impotent Asura, our protagonist managed to defeat the god by going all Super Saiyan, sprouting four extra arms, and unleashing a devastating punch into the god's index finger.

"There are more than just giant bosses in this game," Capcom producer Kazuhiro Tsuchiya later assured us. "There are many different types of bosses. And we haven't shown them yet, obviously, but when you see them, you're going to be pretty surprised by the shape and the style that they take."

SCOTT BUTTERWORTH



What could possibly be more intense than fighting a planet-sized god? The developers may surprise us with the answer.

The game's story and art style blend aspects of traditional Japanese mythology with modern sci-fi and, apparently, a liberal dash of anime.

Max Payne has taken up shop in Brazil, working as a private security agent.

FIRST LOOK Format **PS3** ETA **TBD** Pub **Rockstar** Dev **Rockstar Vancouver**

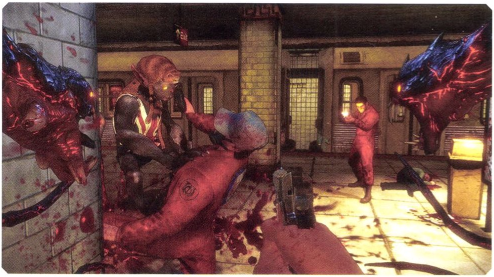
Max Payne 3

The resumption of agony

A drunk, drugged-out Max Payne seems like the cure for the disease that is rambunctious criminal behavior.

Former cop Payne goes euphoric in this new, third-person adventure. The game, set in Brazil and eight years after the events of *Max Payne 2*, utilizes the same engine technology powering the quirky football game *Backbreaker*. It allows Payne to move naturally in the environments, both reacting to and interacting with objects around him.

Oh, and there will be plentiful gunfire wrecking destructible set-pieces, and Payne's signature, slow-motion bullet-time killing sprees. With Payne's triumphant return, we have the right to remain giddy. GREG ORLANDO



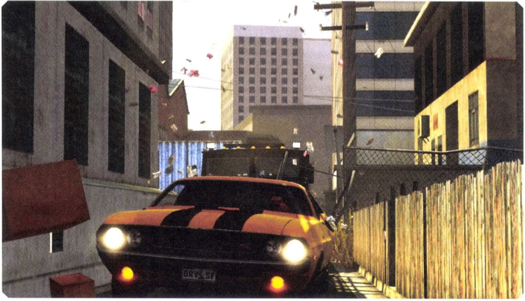
UPDATE Format **PS3** ETA **2012** Pub **2K Games** Dev **Digital Extremes**

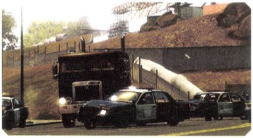
The Darkness II

Enlightening slaughter

Jackie Estacado is back and our dark protagonist is certainly moving up in the world. After whacking his Uncle Paulie, Jackie has become the Don of the Estacado family, but with this status upgrade comes a truckload of problems. The parasitic entity known as the Darkness is back and we highly doubt Jackie and he are best friends forever now.

A new enemy has also made itself known; an ancient organization known as the Brotherhood is after the Darkness for its own purposes and will





It's a good thing *Driver: San Francisco's* 140-plus cars are licensed, because ours is about to be revoked.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **August** Pub **Ubisoft** Dev **Ubisoft Reflections**

Driver San Francisco

Where the streets have no parking

Racing through *Driver: San Francisco's* streets with detectives John Tanner and Tobias Jones, it seemed we were channeling *Burnout Paradise* and *Crazy Taxi* in a *Grand Theft Auto* wrapper. Admittedly, that's not bad company to have if vehicular mayhem is the prime intention.

The franchise's PS3 debut picks up six months after the events of the PS2's *Driver 3* with Tanner and Jones facing off against their arch-nemesis, mob boss Charles Jericho. The first of the game's eight chapters serves as both tutorial and stage setter as the cops try to foil Jericho's escape attempt. As we weaved through traffic and dodged pedestrians, the driving was suitably drift-happy and contact heavy, but the outcome was unfavorable as a semi truck slammed into Tanner's vintage 1970 Dodge Challenger, propelling him into a coma.

But the debilitating effects of being comatose have, apparently, been greatly exaggerated as *San Francisco* utilizes it as the basis for its strange Shift mechanic. Shifting allows Tanner to continue his investigation and manhunt for Jericho by enabling him to effortlessly hop between any vehicle populating *San Francisco's* streets by assuming demonic-style possession of the drivers. We're not sure how the coma-acquired evidence will stand up in court, but it does make a great excuse for intense car chases and driving challenges on more than 200 miles of liberally interpreted Bay Area roads.

With a stated 60fps target, the cars should look as good as they perform, but *San Francisco's* key will be how well the crime-drama storyline ultimately melds with its open-world driving action. ROGER BURCHILL

Dev Talk

"San Francisco is an incredibly difficult city to recreate as you can get very high sight lines. We're certainly squeezing the last blood out of the PS3, that's for sure."

Martin Edmondson
Creative Director

---

employ any means to capture it. "The Brotherhood changed from being something that wanted to destroy the Darkness to something that wanted to control and use it," says Sheldon Carter, project leader at Digital Extremes. Leading the Brotherhood is a mysterious man named Victor, who previously had possession of the Darkness, but was left crippled when it abandoned him. Victor and the Brotherhood will exploit Jackie's weakness to light by utilizing flash bangs, flares, and light cannons, disorienting Jackie and limiting the Darkness' powers.

Several new mechanics including quad wielding—which allows us to simultaneously use guns and the familiar demon arms—have been added to the game. A talent tree gives *The Darkness II* an FPS-meets-RPG feel as we level up Jackie's abilities in four areas: guns, demon arms, heart eating, and powers. ANNE LEWIS

Where the hell is Hitman 5?

It's an assassination nation: the latest news is that *Hitman 5* is finally coming, and it'll be shown at E3 in June. Square Enix has already teased us with clues and a brand-new screenshot sourced from an online *Hitman* alternate reality game, and the hot rumor is Agent 47 will make his return appearance by year's end.

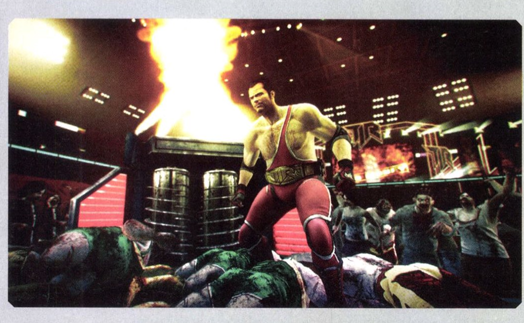
The latest on...

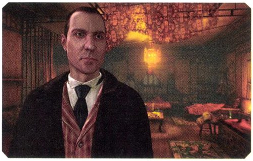
New shots, new games, new info

Dead Rising 2: Off the Record

Format **PS3** ETA **Fall** Pub **Capcom**
Dev **Capcom Vancouver (formerly Blue Castle)**

What's Frank West doing in Fortune City? Trying desperately to extend his 15 minutes of fame. While the setting and basic gameplay remain largely unchanged, *Dead Rising 2: Off the Record* offers an all-new alternate storyline with West—now a washed-up celebrity—tackling the Fortune City outbreak. It also revives the original game's photography mechanic, which allows players to accrue experience by snapping pictures, and employs new automatic checkpoints that circumvent the otherwise unforgiving save system. Best of all, this game will be "priced appropriately" upon release.





The Testament of Sherlock Holmes

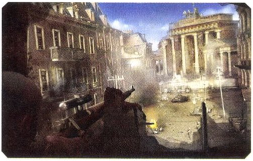
Format **PS3** ETA **Winter** Pub **Focus Home** Dev **Frogwares**

We can use Sherlock Holmes' famed powers of deduction to interrogate witnesses and examine clues in this mature adventure. We'll need every bit of the detective's prowess, as Holmes has been fingered for a crime.

NCAA Football 12 HD

Format **PS3** ETA **July** Pub **EA Sports** Dev **EA Tiburon**

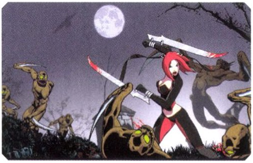
This year's iteration of Electronic Arts' college football extravanganza promises graphical updates galore, including player dreadlocks and 3D grass. Oh, and there'll be great new plays, too, such as the Triple Option, PA Slide, and "Badger Power."



Sniper Elite 2

Format **PS3** ETA **2012** Pub **505 Games** Dev **Rebellion**

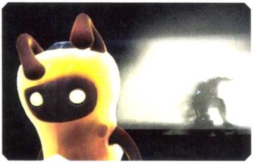
A sequel to the 2005 tactical third-person shooter, *Sniper Elite 2* puts us in the role of a highly trained marksman fighting against Nazi tyranny. Our goal here, as befitting a sniper, is to pick off high-profile targets during the waning days of World War II.



BloodRayne: Betrayal

Format **PSN** ETA **Summer** Pub **Majesco** Dev **WayForward**

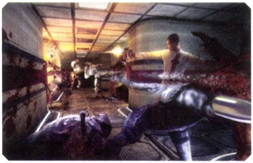
Busty anti-heroine redhead Rayne makes a bloody return in *BloodRayne: Betrayal*, a 2D side-scrolling action game. The Brimstone Society recruits Rayne, and she'll need to use her blood-sucking powers to put a vampire assault to rest.



Warp

Format **PSN** ETA **TBD** Pub **Electronic Arts** Dev **Trapdoor**

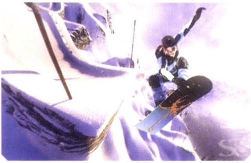
We're intrigued by this stealth adventure by new developer Trapdoor Games. It's a futuristic title featuring a lovable scamp of an alien attempting to flee from captivity while avoiding gunfire, disarming traps, solving puzzles, and mastering a teleportation element.



Afterfall: Insanity

Format **PS3** ETA **TBD** Pub **Just A Game** Dev **Nicolas Games**

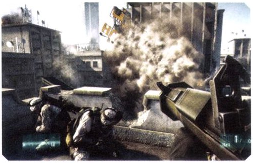
It's the end of the world, and we feel...creeped out. Welcome to 2032, post-nuclear holocaust, where we, as a psychologist, have to shoot mutants and war victims in the third-person perspective. Expect claustrophobia, horrors, and blood aplenty.



SSX

Format **PS3** ETA **2012** Pub **Electronic Arts** Dev **EA Canada**

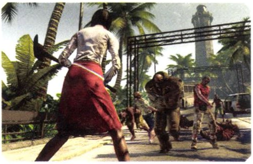
Gone: the gloomy, brooding *Deadly Descents* subtitle. Back: big trails, bigger mountains, biggerer tricks. The *SSX* we knew and loved back on PS2 seems to be poised for a triumphant return, complete with over-the-top moves and returning stars like the beloved Elise Riggs.



Battlefield 3

Format **PS3** ETA **November** Pub **Electronic Arts** Dev **DICE**

On this battlefield, we can slug it out with 24 players and pilot jets and helicopters. The game's single-player mode lets us experience warfare after a devastating earthquake, and just about everything in the game's environments can be blown to bits.



Dead Island

Format **PS3** ETA **August** Pub **Deep Silver** Dev **Techland**

Check out *Dead Island's* assassin Xian Mei. She's one of four playable heroes (along with the tank Sam B. and two others) on the zombie-infested island of Banoi. Each character in this eminently creepy first-person horror-fest will have their own cool skillset.

Gut Reaction

The right and the blight

▲E3

We're excited not only for chicken and waffles and bacon-wrapped hot dogs, but also for NGP and great games.

▲San Francisco

The city by the bay still has our hearts when it comes to the setting for great driving games.

▲Great DLC

More fun with all-new *Fallout: New Vegas* and *COD: Black Ops* add-ons.

▼PSN Down?

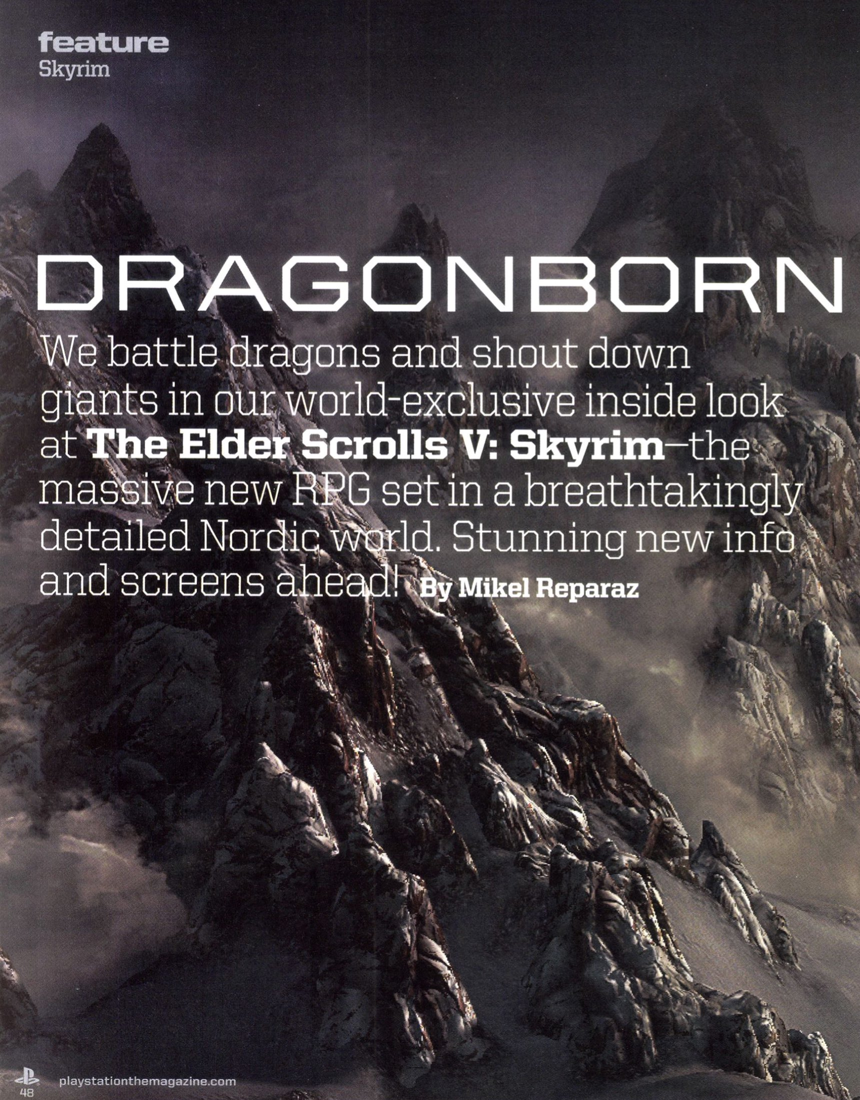
We are experiencing technical difficulties. Please stand by.

▼PSN Down

We are experiencing technical difficulties. Please continue to stand by while we deal with this "external intrusion."

▼PSN DOWN!

We are experiencing technical difficulties. For your safety, please cancel your credit cards and change your mother's maiden name, then continue to stand by...

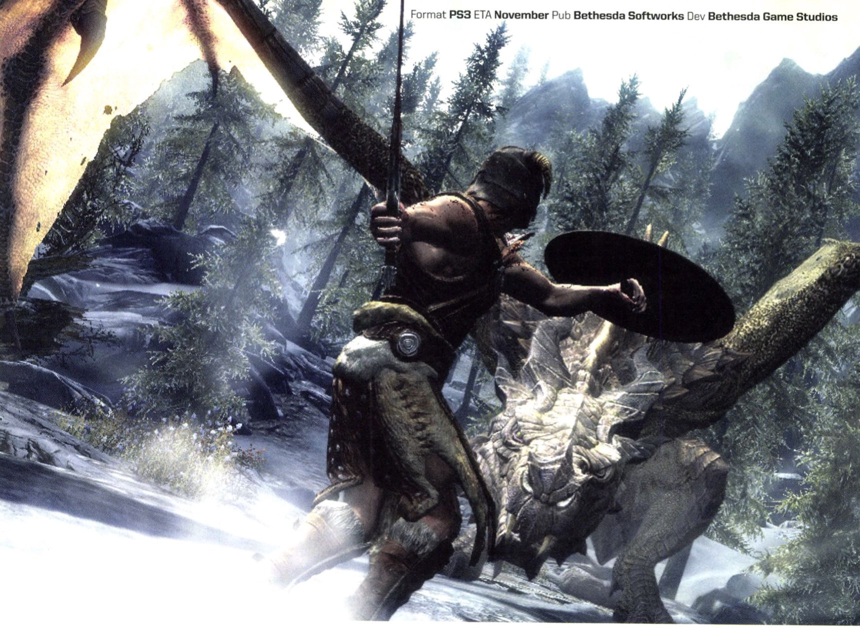


DRAGONBORN

We battle dragons and shout down giants in our world-exclusive inside look at **The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim**—the massive new RPG set in a breathtakingly detailed Nordic world. Stunning new info and screens ahead! **By Mikel Reparaz**

WORLD EXCLUSIVE SCREENS
PlayStation
The Official Magazine

Format **PS3** ETA **November** Pub **Bethesda Softworks** Dev **Bethesda Game Studios**



Regardless of what we've seen previously, the land of Skyrim isn't all snowy mountains and sparse pine forests. Some parts are actually quite lush. Others are somewhere in between, and it's in one of those intermediate areas—specifically the miles of brown-and-green tundra outside the central city of Whiterun—where we find ourselves when the dragon attacks.

Prior to its arrival, we picked a fight with a towering mammoth, an act that enraged not only its (previously indifferent) herd, but also the 12-foot-tall, club-wielding giants traveling with it. Being surrounded by enormous, angry creatures was a new experience, given the mostly man-sized threats in previous *Elder Scrolls* games, but it turned out we were more than equipped to deal with them.

"Yol Toor!" we intoned, and a jet of fiery breath shot forward. This was a "shout," a spell cast in the language of dragons and an innate power of *Skyrim's* hero, and it brought one of the giants toppling down. No sooner had he hit the ground, however, than something scaly and vicious swept out of the sky and scooped up the giant's body in one massive claw. And as the herd scattered, we came face to face with our first dragon. Just before we're bathed in the column of flame cascading from its jaws, we hear it speak a familiar word in a guttural rumble—the same word we'd just used to take down the giant.

Dragons are among the biggest and most important challenges we'll face when *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* hits on November 11—and they're also the most unpredictable. They spawn into the world randomly, as with any other creature (although not quite as frequently), and their behavior and abilities are largely unscripted, making each one a challenge demanding a different strategy to defeat. This one likes to flap around breathing fire, so for now, our strategy is to run.

Fire and Ice

As the dragon chases us, we lure it toward the ruins of a tower, where a handful of friendly guards from Whiterun are fortuitously patrolling. They attack as the dragon draws near them, letting fly with arrows and getting sprayed with fire in return. As the dragon snatches one of them up in its claws, we turn and join the fight, leveling lightning and force spells at the beast until it comes crashing down to earth.

When they're hurt badly enough, dragons can't fly—and while they're on the ground, they're vulnerable to close-quarters attacks. With a spell in our left hand and an elven longsword in our right, we move in close as our new allies distract it and take a few swings. Annoyed, it lifts off again, only to be brought crashing down by another spell volley. Too injured to fly, it's now easy prey for the warriors, but as they close in to finish it off, a second dragon appears in the sky. *"Iiz Slen!"* it

> Being surrounded by enormous, angry creatures was a new experience, given the mostly man-sized threats in previous *Elder Scrolls* games.

booms, and a spray of frost crystals erupts from its mouth and rains down on us.

It's not common for multiple dragons to show up at once, but it's possible, and this one's appearance has put us in a bad position. Luckily, our new friends have managed to kill the first dragon, and as death reduces it to a flaming skeleton, we absorb its soul. That soul gives us the power to unlock a new, high-level shout—Storm Call—and, turning on the new dragon, we decide it's time to field-test it. Each shout has three levels of power (charged by holding down R2), and for this one, we're going all out.

"Strun Bah Qo!" we bellow, and the sky darkens in a vortex of swirling black clouds. As heavy rain begins to pour down, lightning crackles out of the sky, striking the dragon (and everyone else nearby) repeatedly. This isn't enough to kill it, so we start shouting fire at it. As a frost dragon, this should be its greatest weakness, and soon enough the creature is brought down to rest among the bodies of the fallen soldiers, quickly becoming a flaming skeleton like the one before it. As its soul becomes ours, we raise both fists skyward and scream *"Dovahkiin!"* while the music swells. This is what it means to be Dragonborn. This is *Skyrim.*

Charging our shouts takes time, but is ultimately worth it. There is an element of risk in charging a spell, however.

Shout It Loud

Magic and weapons are all well and good, but real power lies in shouting. These abilities (of which there will be over 20) are innate to dragons and the Dragonborn, and can be unlocked using dragon souls and words found in dungeons. Each also has three power levels, which can be activated by holding down R2 longer (although these also have to be unlocked). In addition to Fire Breath and Storm Call, here are a few standouts:

Whirlwind Sprint

Lets players blast rapidly in one direction; ideal for aiming distance-attacks at fleeing enemies or getting in close to bash them.

Slow Time

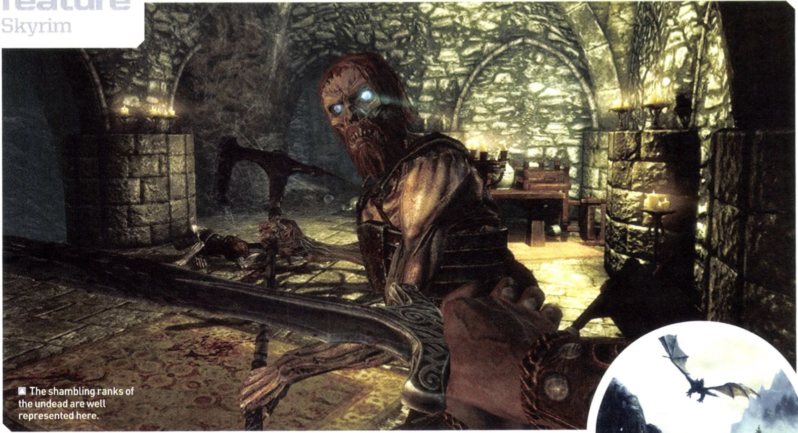
Slows the action to a crawl, effectively rendering most enemies helpless.

Ice Form

Encases enemies in a block of ice, temporarily paralyzing them.

Unrelenting Force

A powerful energy wave that can stagger enemies or knock them off cliffs.



The shambling ranks of the undead are well represented here.

Before we even meet our first dragon, we've got some things to figure out. We're Dragonborn (or Dovahkiin), a prophesied warrior born with a dragon's soul—that much we know. And, 200 years after the events of *Oblivion*, dragons are back. That much is obvious. But why? Unraveling that mystery lies at the core of Skyrim's storyline and gameplay. Two things are certain, however: We've just barely escaped execution, and now we're wandering toward a small mountain village called Riverwood in the northern province of Tamriel.

As we trudge down a dirt path, a couple of foxes dart past. "We have animals that hunt," says game director Todd Howard, who's driving our demo. "So this fox is trying to hunt rabbits, and that'll just happen throughout the world."

That level of autonomous detail is visible once we get to town, too. In addition to going about their clockwork lives and chatting each other up, Riverwood's citizens have jobs, which we can observe them performing. A blacksmith sits by his forge, sharpening a sword and waiting for us to hire him. Further down the road, a lumbermill worker hefts huge logs from a pile and sets them down on a gangplank. It's possible to do some of the jobs ourselves, which Howard demonstrates by splitting a log, the pieces of which can then be sold—or used in a furnace, which can then smelt ore for use in crafting or upgrading weapons.

Riverwood is just a pit stop on the way to a dungeon called Bleak Falls Barrow, a Nord ruin where we're to retrieve a golden claw from some thieves. It's one of a few possible quests that could send us there, Howard tells us, and it's possible for multiple quests in *Skyrim* to direct players to the same location. That's because dungeons are where new, shout-unlocking dragon words are hidden, making it important that players find their way there eventually.

There Be Draugr

There are about 120 dungeons in *Skyrim*, and the Barrow is a medium-sized one—although that's hard to believe, given how much happens in it. From the outset, it's clear that everything here has an organic, handmade feel, from the wind that blows the dynamically generated snow around its caverns, to the symbol-and-switch-based logic puzzle we have to solve in order to open the way ahead. Startlingly, it's also well-lit, meaning we don't have to rely on light spells or torches to see.

It's not long before squads of bandits attack us, but they're not much of a threat, proving vulnerable to our bow (complete with a slow-motion sniper zoom) and the magical frost runes we keep slapping on the floor like landmines. Indeed, they're clearly a warm-up for the much more challenging tussles ahead. As we surge forward, we hear the pleading screams of Arvel the Swift, the man who stole the golden claw we seek, and we eventually spot him trussed up in webbing. Before we can reach him, a massive spider drops down

This is some crazy disco inferno, only no one's holding his ears in aural agony.

200 years after the events of *Oblivion*, dragons are back. But why? Unraveling that mystery lies at the core of *Skyrim's* storyline and gameplay.

from the ceiling, obliging us to plant a magically summoned battle ax in its face.

With the spider dead, Arvel says he understands the golden claw's power and will share it with us if we free him. Once he's cut loose, however, he calls us fools and makes a break for it. We quickly chase him down and take the claw by force, but Arvel wouldn't have gotten far anyway as we're soon confronted by a small army of Draugr—an extremely tough variety of undead Nord. Hacking through them is an ordeal, but it's worth it when we use the claw to solve a puzzle guarding the dungeon's ultimate prize: a wall of dragon writing that teaches us the mighty Storm Call shout.

The fighting isn't finished, though. No sooner do we read the word than a sarcophagus in the middle of the room bursts open, and a big, tough-looking Draugr Overlord climbs out and attacks. He doesn't go down easy, but at least his tomb has a few treasure chests to loot once we're done with him.

Double Up

With no real classes, *Skyrim* lets us decide how we want to play—one way is through the new dual-wielding system, by which we assign items, weapons, or spells to the left hand (controlled with L1) or the right (R1). Below are a few combinations to consider:

Sword and shield
Classic loadout allows for efficient attacking, blocking, and shield bashing.

Sword and torch
Not only can torches light dark areas, but they can now be used for blocking, and bashing enemies will set them on fire.

Sword and ax
Because, sometimes, it's just too hard to decide.

Lightning spell and mace
Zap enemies from a distance, then bash 'em while they're reeling.

Two lightning spells
Putting the same spell in both hands lets us combine them for a bigger, more devastating version that chains between enemies and bounces off walls.

Warding spell and ax
Relying on a steel disc seems silly when a ward (shield) spell can rapidly expand to encase us completely.

Two-handed weapons
Staffs, bows, and two-handed swords can still be used, although they're better at bashing than blocking.

Look at that stunning vista. Let's bulldoze everything and put up a mini-mall.

> "We built this big script for *Fallout 3* that generated random encounters based on stuff you did. Now, our quest system just works that way. It's always looking at what's going on." *–Todd Howard, Game Director*

By any standard, let alone the standards of open-world games, *Skyrim* looks impressive. Its world is huge and ridiculously pretty, and its flexible dual-wielding action (which features the option of improved third-person play) looks enormously fun. Perhaps more remarkable than the beauty and the combat, however, is the obsessive level of detail that Howard's team has managed to cram into the world.

Aside from features like the random creature behaviors and townie jobs, every single one of the game's thousands of items, no matter how strange or insignificant, has been fully modeled in 3D, and can be examined for clues in the inventory screen. Additionally, most of the plants in the game can be picked. Random NPCs wander up and talk to us, or hold conversations with each other. Towns also have active economies, which we can sabotage if we choose.

Then there are the three main crafting systems—enchantment, smithing, and

alchemy—that enable us to create items, upgrade them with 13 different kinds of ore (which replaces the tedious weapon/armor repair of *Oblivion*) and imbue them with magical properties. Even the conversations are deeper, with *Oblivion's* annoying wheel-based influence minigame replaced with *Fallout*-style dialogue choices.

However, the real standout may be Radiant Story, *Skyrim's* new somewhat-randomized quest system. "We built this big script for *Fallout 3* that generated random encounters based on stuff you did," says Howard. "Now, our quest system just works that way. It's always looking at what's going on, and designers can use all those parameters to either generate a quest, or make a quest dynamic. Every variable you have in a quest, whether that's where it takes place, the treasure, the people, anything, can either be specific—this guy wants this from here, or it can be dynamic—this *type* of person wants this *type* of thing from this *type* of location."

"A bunch of the quests we wrote felt really fake. They generated things that felt very artificial," continues Howard. "So now most of our quests are handwritten, and they have random/radiant elements to them. It's how we regain some control, like 'Hey, you missed this dungeon,' or 'You haven't fought this type of creature.' Okay, this quest, or this guy who wants this thing, we're going to move it here."

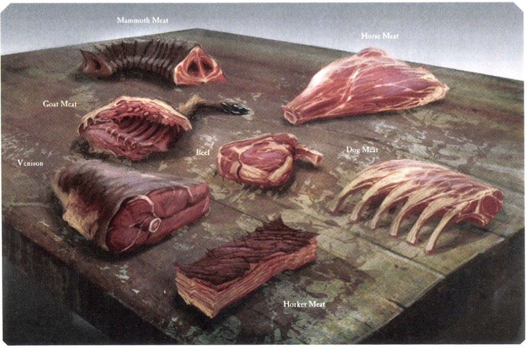
Bigger and Better

Most strikingly, all of this exists in a game that's even bigger than *Oblivion*. *Skyrim* boasts around 60,000 lines of recorded dialogue, compared to *Oblivion's* 40,000 (and yes, Bethesda's hiring a lot more voice actors). Experiencing everything in the world will take around 300 hours—or, Howard estimates, around 20 to 30 hours if we merely blast straight through the main quest.

At the same time, Bethesda's been careful to balance the layers of complexity with a simpler interface. Gone is *Oblivion's* clunky inventory screen, with its multiple menus and unwieldy item lists. In its place is a simpler menu that pops up when we hit Circle. Hitting right on the D-pad brings up a list of items, left brings up spells, and up displays our skills. Items and spells can be browsed in categorized, multi-leveled lists, and equipping them is as simple as hitting L1 or R1 to assign them to a hand. It's also possible to create a favorites list, which can be accessed by simply hitting up on the D-pad during gameplay.

Skills—which include abilities like blocking, sneaking, speechcraft, and destruction spells—are another thing entirely. To view them, we "look to the heavens" (again, up on the D-pad), where relevant abilities are listed under *Skyrim's* three main constellations: the warrior (for combat skills), the thief (stealth), and the mage (magic). Each one of those skills is attached to a veritable galaxy of perks (around 280 in all, although that number might change), which are chosen one at a time as we level up, and which appear as a skill tree/star map that shows which perks we'll have to unlock to reach the ones we *really* want.

The three constellations are also among *Skyrim's* 13 "birthsigns," which can impart skill boosts and special powers. However, unlike in previous games (in which we had to pick a birthsign from the beginning), they're now activated through large standing stones, or Doomstones. We still attach ourselves to only one birthsign at a time, but at least now it's possible to switch them out if we don't like what they have to offer.



Meaty Details

For an idea of *Skyrim's* crazy level of detail, consider the "Meat Table." In a game where players don't have to eat, a world-class concept artist meticulously painted what chunks of meat should look like in the game (and in our inventory), adding a largely unnecessary (but appreciated!) layer of realism to an already staggeringly realized world.

Confirmed! Four more Skyrim secrets revealed

Horses

Trusty mounts are back again, this time with an upgrade. Not only are they much more detailed than in *Oblivion*, but Howard tells us they'll actually handle like horses, instead of jeeps. Also, they can sprint.

Factions

While *Skyrim* may boast more groups, we know it has at least three major factions: the warrior Companions, the magic-using College of Winterhold, and the Thieves' Guild. Each has its own storyline for players to follow, and they won't be as oblivious to the outside world as their *Oblivion* predecessors.

Fast travel

Once again, we'll be able to teleport instantly to any place we've already been. And to make sure players can explore the far-flung cities early on, there'll be a system of carriages to get us there in a hurry.

Guards

While *Skyrim's* lawmen won't sport the high-end equipment they did in *Oblivion*, they're nonetheless tough enough to take us down—no matter how powerful we get. Lucky for us, the game's divided into nine areas, or "Holds," and it's possible to be a wanted criminal in one and an upstanding citizen in the rest.

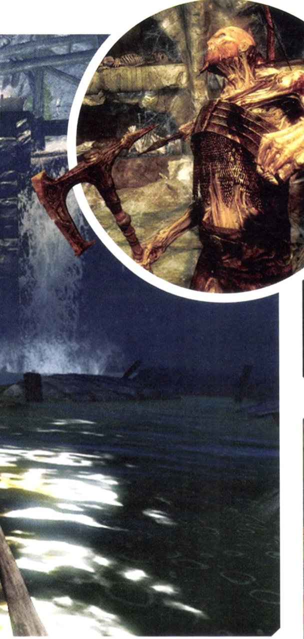
■ Rather than scaling to the hero's level, some dungeons are locked within an encounter range.

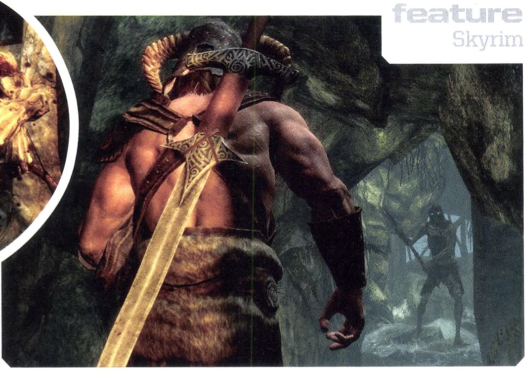
For a game made of so many baroque cogs, *Skyrim* appears to fit together remarkably well, as all of its assorted systems and features conspire to create what's already looking like one of the most meticulous virtual worlds we've ever seen. And even with all that complexity at work, it still manages to be staggeringly, time-suckingly *huge*. Aside from the rolling valleys and fog-ringed mountains, there are multiple large cities to explore (most of them at the edges of the map), at least three separate faction questlines to follow in addition to the central quest, and no shortage of ways to get into trouble.

"We actually surprise ourselves with how big it is," says Howard. "It always ends up bigger than we intended, because our tools get better and better, and a lot of people have really good ideas, and we're just trying to put as much content in that we feel is cool and appropriate. We want to give the player a lot of avenues to do things. Our whole thing is to create a virtual fantasy world, and then *you* get to go do what you want. We think handing over the keys is the most fun."

Handing over the keys has clearly informed a lot of *Skyrim's* design, particularly where leveling is concerned. Rather than forcing us to pick a class right off the bat (and then be stuck having to build up that class' associated skills for the rest of the game), *Skyrim* asks players to simply pick a race—each of which comes with different stat bonuses and abilities—and adjust their appearance before heading out into the world. Becoming more powerful is now just a matter of boosting whichever skills players use the most, through repeated use. (Sadly, this can no

> "Our whole thing is to create a virtual fantasy world, and then *you* get to go do what you want. We think handing over the keys is the most fun." –*Todd Howard*





▲ Every area is hand-touched, full of rich details—and men with deadly hammers.

longer be done by repeatedly bunny-hopping everywhere, as the acrobatics, athletics, and even hand-to-hand skills have been removed from the game.)

No Stone Unturned

Even with the level of freedom it promises, however, *Skyrim* doesn't appear to be in any danger of becoming an arbitrary mess. While it takes a random approach to a number of elements, it also employs complex behind-the-scenes rule sets to ensure they remain fun. The dragon attacks, for example, are largely random, but the game keeps track of the encounters so as not to overwhelm us with too many of the lizards at once—or, worse, to let us wander for too long without a single scaly soul to steal. Even Radiant Story, which "randomizes" certain aspects of its quests, seems to be more about ensuring that we go places and do things we've neglected or ignored, rather than simply making things unpredictable.

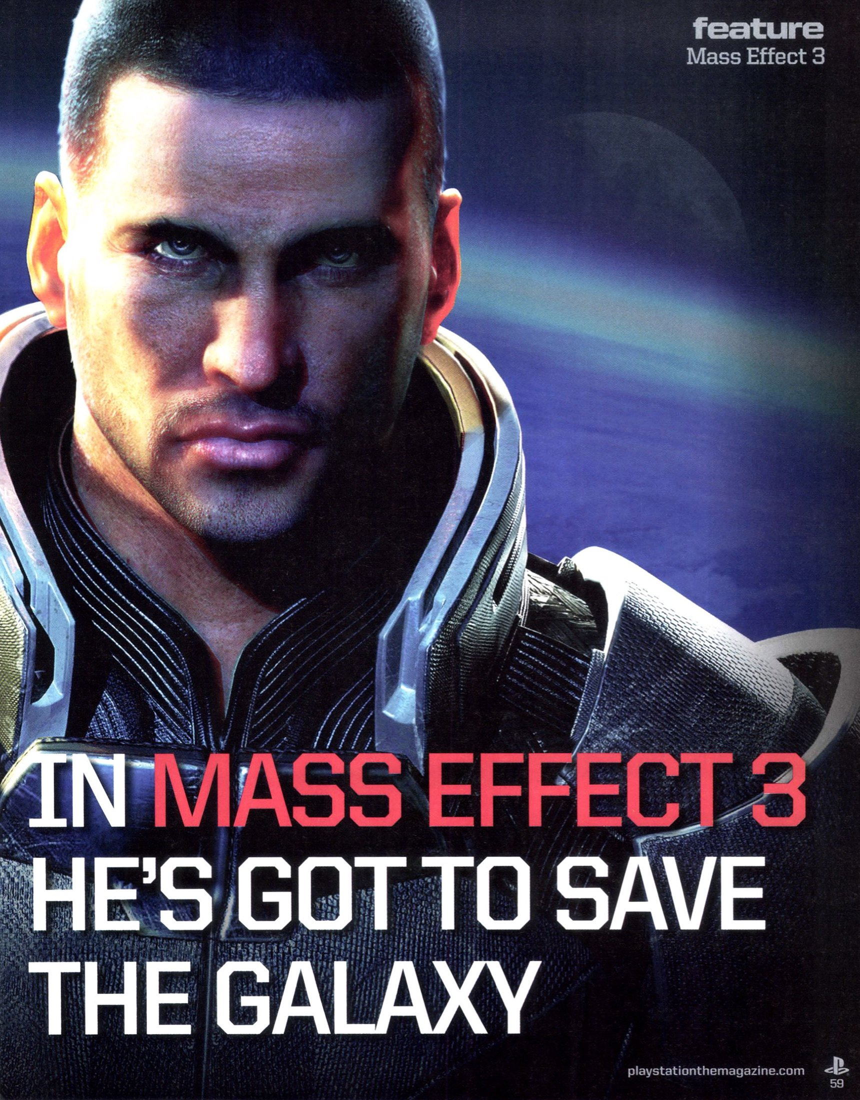
And then there are the more tightly controlled dungeons. It's here that Bethesda subtly takes back the directorial reins to create a more scripted, dramatic experience. "What we're trying to do, particularly in a dungeon, is craft more of an experience," says Howard. "Pattern out those combat encounters, the traps, what you're finding, where the lighting is, how balanced the individual treasure chests are. That's the area where we've tried to regain a lot of [control]."

It's worth noting, too, that Howard and his team seem to have thought of *everything*. As we interview them, we eventually run out of generalized questions and start to get increasingly granular. How much meat do we get for killing a mammoth? How about a giant? What are the inventory weight limitations? How complex is the clothing system? No matter what the question, they've got the definitive answers on hand (just its nose; a gross-looking big toe; players will be able to carry a lot more stuff than in *Oblivion*; and clothing will be simplified, with outfits and armor sets coming as a single suit rather than separate parts).

It's clear, after just a few hours with *Skyrim*, that the game will indeed be enormous—not only in terms of its size and scope but in the experiences it's going to offer players come November 11. During our demo alone, we saw gameplay that ranged from quiet, nonviolent tasks to frantic dungeon-delving to moments of exultant ass-kicking in huge, open-air battles with colossal dragons. *Skyrim* is bigger than *Elder Scrolls* has ever been before, and we can't wait to dive in.

JOHN SHEPARD IS NO ORDINARY SPACE MARINE

HE'S BEEN BURNT TO CINDERS AND
COME BACK FROM THE DEAD
HE'S DECIDED THE FATE OF ENTIRE SPECIES
HE'S ROMANCED AND SLEPT WITH ALIENS
HE'S EVEN WON AWARDS, BUT...



IN MASS EFFECT 3 HE'S GOT TO SAVE THE GALAXY

The best games—the truly enduring ones—are greater than the sum of their parts. Although most still fall into neat categories such as "shooter" or "RPG," these games are more than just collisions of game mechanics and cutscenes. They live on in gamers' imaginations and discussions long after the credits have rolled, and it's these games—the likes of *Metal Gear Solid 4*, *The Elder Scrolls IV*, or *Heavy Rain*—that truly define the generations of console gaming.

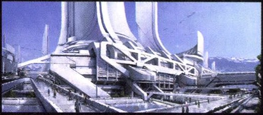
Mass Effect is definitive. The series is far greater than the sum of its parts, defying pigeon-holing way beyond the broad stroke of "sci-fi adventure." When the third game plays out, we believe it could be a high watermark for the current generation of consoles. Right now, as we sit facing Casey Hudson, executive producer of the whole franchise, we're acutely aware of that.

Why? We've seen *Mass Effect 3's* unassembled parts at BioWare's HQ: the improved character models, the epically scaled cutscenes, the enhanced combat and weapon systems. But we're yet to get a feel for the *whole*. We're mulling what will make this third game special when Hudson nails it in one word: magic.

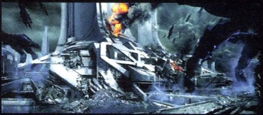
"There are certain things you want to do when making a game that are part of the 'magic' of the experience," says Hudson. "Those things aren't necessarily the big things—they're often little moments. There's a lot of this in *Mass Effect 3*. The whole game is filled with really epic moments, but I think the story will really start to hit home when players start realizing things about Shepard's personal life, the true consequences of all the sacrifices he's had to make."

THE ART OF CREATION

How BioWare is building the end of the world



HOME SWEET HOME This is one of the Earth cities, a mega conurbation formed by the meeting of Seattle and Vancouver.



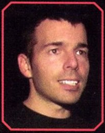
HOMEFRONT BioWare is building some cities with the intention of smashing them up as they're decimated by the Reapers.

Uncharted Space

Hudson is cagey about *ME3's* story, and frankly—for once—we don't press too hard for details. After all, the joy of this vast universe comes from discovery: the sudden impact of all the little choices coming home to roost. There's nothing to be gained from plot spoilers. Although PS3 owners are relatively new to the series, having only sampled

HOW TO END AN EPIC TALE

Executive producer Casey Hudson on a Mass-ive creative process



How on Earth (pun intended) can BioWare resolve every story and decision in this vast series? "It's easier than it seems," says Hudson. "We make no attempt to lay out the logic in an intentional way, so instead of a technical engineering project it all comes back to our writers. Say our writers are creating a plot and there's great action in it, and a few nice personal moments—they're free to create that. At the same time we'd see if there are any characters from previous moments we could adapt to fit into this scenario.

ROLE PLAY

"Alternatively, they can look for scenarios that don't involve anything that has happened before, but a character is about to enter the scene—they can choose to make this new character variable to allow for previous player choices. For example, the guy who asks for your autograph, Conrad Verner. We could create a scene where you walk into a bar and two characters start fighting. They don't have to be brand new: one could be Conrad. And if you've played the first game you'll see it and say 'Oh my god, that's Conrad Verner!'"

the second game, they've already made some big choices. Some, such as the decisions we were forced into during the final assault, are obvious, their consequences already played out. Others remain more ambiguous—pregnant with the potential to create agonizing spectacle during this final game. The Collector research, the Genophage, Shepard's questionable romantic liaisons... They all feed into *ME3's* overarching theme of "victory through sacrifice on a galactic scale."

DOWN BOY Cerberus have turned against Shepard, so he must fight them even while trying to save the galaxy from the Reapers. He's a busy man.

It all starts on Earth. Anyone who's seen the teaser trailer knows this third game finally tells humanity's story, something brought brutally home as the camera zooms out to reveal London, England, ravaged by Reapers as Shepard looks on from orbit. However, the game begins with Shepard down on the surface. Soon overwhelmed, he retreats into space to gather alien allies for one final epic showdown—a fight where he takes back his entire homeworld...or doesn't. Nothing can be taken for granted in *Mass Effect*.

Ready for battle

The new features behind the sequel's improved combat

SUPPORT CLASS

Shepard also showed off new class-based abilities. The Engineer, for example, has a turret you can deploy to distract—but not decimate—enemies.

HIT HARD

Melee attacks have been beefed up. Now there's a special attack—the exact nature varies by character class—that's a one-hit-kill from close range.

SOUNDS OF BATTLE(FIELD)

BioWare shares sound tech with *Battlefield*-meisters DICE, who won awards for *Bad Company 2's* audio. The end result is gunfire sounding different indoors and out, sound decay over distance, and an astonishing degree of sonic believability.

MOD NATION

This time weapons can be modded with up to five different attachments. Think scopes, grips, and under-barrel extras. It might not be original, but it does add extra dimensions to firefights.

MOVING ON UP
Shepard has learned some new stuff. He can peep over and around objects, dive out from or vault over scenery, and perform SWAT turns between bits of cover.

WHEEL DEAL
The command wheel for special abilities and weapon changes is back, as are quick commands mapped to face buttons and the D-pad.

FASTER, KILL KILL The combat demo we saw revealed that gunfights are quicker and deadlier.

However, there's more at stake than just one planet. It's all or nothing for the whole galaxy: if Shepard and his team fail, the Reapers will wipe out every living race and begin their eternal cycle of creation and destruction again.

So, friends are needed. Shepard must call in favors earned during previous games, and journey through the galaxy's 100 million stars to new planets to enlist the help of all the other species. Visits include the Salarian homeworld, the Quarian planet Rannoch—now occupied by the Geth—and plenty more. Travel to a human mining operation on Mars, and of course to Earth itself, to a giant city formed when Seattle and Vancouver sprawled into each other across the American Northwest. The mega city's name is unannounced, though fingers crossed for our suggestion of "Sea-Couver," eh? Eh? Sounds a bit like *seek cover*. That's funny.

Wonderful Worlds

Despite our early studio visit, *ME3's* locations already look incredible. We've seen the Earth city in a near-finished state: its curved, futuristic buildings bathed in beautiful light as the sea laps against the waterfront and docks. Visually it's snapping at the heels of FPS standouts *Crysis 2* and *Killzone 3*, with more than six months of development left to run.

A shame then, that the next thing we're shown is the same city ruined and smoking after the Reaper attack. The whole galaxy is at war, so Shepard isn't short of potential allies—it's how he uses them that matters, and ultimately his decisions will make the difference between survival and extinction for entire races. We got a

Guess who's back...

The exact makeup of the crew depends on the player as *Mass Effect 3* either reads past save files or forces new, deadly decisions

THE SOLDIER: ASHLEY WILLIAMS

This sexually aggressive, xenophobic human marine will likely return—most players save her at the end of *Mass Effect*, sacrificing the nicer, less chesty Kaidan Alenko instead.

CONFIRMED? YES (Part of squad)

THE OTHER SOLDIER: KAIDAN ALENKO

Like Ashley, Kaidan dates from the first *Mass Effect*, and will appear if he was saved over the she-marine at game's end. Both characters have been remodeled, and both have been promoted to Spectre.

CONFIRMED? YES (Part of squad)

THE BIOTIC: LIARA T'SONI

This Asari was a core crew member in *Mass Effect*, and unlockable in *ME2's* Lair of the Shadow Broker DLC. She's a standard crew member here. And yes, she can be sexed up 'til she's blue(r) in the face.

CONFIRMED? YES (Part of squad)

THE RENEGADE: GARRUS VAKARIAN

Another series-spanning sidekick, Garrus left to cause trouble on Omega under the assumed name of Archangel. Shepard tracks him down, rescues him from a tight spot and gets him on the team.

CONFIRMED? YES (Part of squad)

THE NEW GUY: JAMES SANDERS

A new human character, very little is known about James. His inclusion means Jacob Taylor isn't coming back. According to BioWare, Jacob is one of least popular characters, so no big loss.

CONFIRMED? YES (Part of squad)

THE TECH GIRL: TALI VAS NORMANDY

Will Tali, the Quarian lady with romantic lustings for Shepard, be back? Talk at BioWare suggests she has unfinished business with our hero, so she'll definitely return. Will she be playable? Most likely.

CONFIRMED? YES

THE MUSCLE: GRUNT

It's a no-brainer that Grunt will return in some capacity. His fellow Krogan, Wrex (who is back), was a non-playable return in *ME2*—providing he wasn't killed in the first game, of course.

CONFIRMED? NO

THE SAVIOR: MIRANDA LAWSON

As the main human love interest for male Shepard in *ME2*, she's likely to return and has huge potential to cause lady trouble if she was romanced after Ashley or Liara in the first game.

CONFIRMED? NO

THE OTHER SAVIOR: JACOB TAYLOR

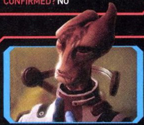
ME2's other human character and a potential squeeze for female Shepards, we don't expect to see Jacob back as a playable squadmate. He was the least popular of the crew on the *Normandy 2*.

CONFIRMED? NO

THE ASSASSIN: THANE

Although Thane was interesting, we don't expect him to be playable this time. His story feels played out and his allegiance to Shepard isn't as strong as with the other crew members.

CONFIRMED: NO



THE SCIENTIST: MORDIN SOLUS

Mordin is so tied up in the series-long Genophage sub-plot that his appearance in *ME3* is guaranteed. Will he be playable? That seems likely too, as the plot dictates that he stay close to Shepard.

CONFIRMED: YES

THE CONVICT: JACK

Jack's redesigned. Art director Derek Watts: "The idea is that she matured, maybe softened up a bit. You can only stay punk rock for so long, you know." Playable? Likely, as she was a popular love interest.

CONFIRMED: YES

THE DEFECTOR: LEGION

It felt weird fighting alongside a Geth in *ME2*, didn't it? Legion will be back, but don't expect him to be playable—his appearance in the second game was more of an "impact moment" than anything.

CONFIRMED: YES

THE FAMILY: MORINTH / SAMARA

Perhaps the least likely of *ME2's* characters to return, largely because it was kill or be killed by Morinth. Mom Samara feels like an outsider on the *Normandy*, even when befriended.

CONFIRMED: NO

THE MERCENARY: ZAEED MASSANI

Despite only being a DLC character, players loved *ME2's* Zaeed. Fan demand may lead to him getting a full character role for the third game—he certainly has a story left to tell, too.

CONFIRMED: NO

THE THIEF: KASUMI GOTO

Another DLC character, Kasumi feels like a bit-part player. Sure, she's likely to make an appearance in *ME3*, but the odds of her becoming a full-blown squadmate seem slim to none. Shame.

CONFIRMED: NO

taste of that during the first game—or rather in the interactive comic-based recap of it—with the race known as the Rachni. Hudson hints that the decision made there will return to bite us in *ME3*.

"The Rachni decision in the first game—that was a really small thing in *Mass Effect 2*, but it's going to have greater consequences in *Mass Effect 3*," says Hudson. "When you look back at certain decisions from the end of the trilogy, you'll realize the choices you made really did have far-reaching consequences."

Wars of stars

No matter the outcome of decisions, there's a constant urgency to *ME3*. Not only do we see it in a much-improved combat demo, but in an epic cutscene where the *Normandy* and a fleet of alien craft jump together through a relay... Yes, just like the ships at the end of *Return of the Jedi*.

"It's a little different in structure to *Mass Effect* and *ME2*," says Hudson. "*Mass Effect* was a pursuit story, and although you were collecting a few pieces of the overall puzzle, you didn't really know what you needed to do or where you needed to be. *Mass Effect 2* was more of a *Dirty Dozen* story, where you're collecting a team to achieve an overall goal. *Mass Effect 3*, in simple terms, is a little more like the first game. You're collecting pieces of a story, but the more you investigate and explore these themes, the more the game will unlock and you'll see the bigger picture. In a way, it's more of a traditional story—like you'd have in a movie for example—where you're learning about things and the plot changes as you find them out."

Along the way, we know for sure that—despite wanting to save the galaxy—Shepard has enemies. Cerberus are hunting him, and much more is to be revealed about this strange organization and its head, the Illusive Man. The Reapers, too, have become a more tangible enemy.

"The choices you made really had far-reaching consequences."

In addition to the minor-planet-sized ships we've encountered in the previous games, Shepard is facing smaller, nimbler craft and half-Reaper, half-organic hybrids;

NEW AND OLD PLAYER FAQ

Those vital Mass Effect questions answered

Can I transfer my saved game?
Yes. If you've played *Mass Effect 2* you can transfer your save to *ME3*, bringing all your decisions with it. Be warned though—if any of your crew died, they'll stay dead in this game.

What if I've never played ME?
Shame on you. Still, BioWare is taking pity (seriously, you don't deserve it) by providing a full series catchup at the start of the game. Casey Hudson describes it as "something similar" to the digital comic in the PS3 version of *Mass Effect 2*.

Is the Normandy back?
Yes, it's back. In *ME3*, the Alliance has re-appropriated the *Normandy* and is pulling it apart to examine the advanced tech Cerberus built into it during *ME2*. It'll also have more areas to explore...

Can I customize my character?
Absolutely, and the options are more extensive than ever. Bear in mind that if you're transferring a save, however, you'll keep the appearance of your existing Shepard. One important new element is that BioWare is relaxing class restrictions for weapons, so—for example—you won't need to be a soldier in order to carry the assault rifle.

creatures created by Reaper experiments. It's hard to know if the experiments were considered a success or not, but their blends of humans with other species have resulted in hideous abominations. We see one new type—the Cannibal—that's part Batarian, part human, and part Reaper. Apparently, it eats other species during combat to give it strength.

If there's one criticism we'd level at the current *Mass Effect* sequel, it's a certain lack of dynamism in the shooting. Fights feel linear, cover points are obvious, and there's a sedate pace born of the original game's role-playing roots. That's not the case with *Mass Effect 3*.

Although the Cannibal isn't the best example of cooperative play at work, we discover enemies now function as units, combining specializations to make firefights more challenging. This, combined with Shepard's own new skills—such as SWAT turns to and from cover and some super-heavy melee attacks—elevates the shooting sections beyond the familiar linear, cover-hugging shootouts. The action is now more on a par with *Uncharted*—an impressive feat for any game.

Dismembers Only

BioWare shows us Shepard and Liara fighting Cerberus grunts on the Salarian homeworld. Here combat feels faster and slicker than ever, as Shepard leaps from cover and rolls between points to flank enemies, gunning them down or inflicting heavy melee hits, and at one point burning an opponent to cinders with one fiery swipe of the Omni-tool.

We also discover Shepard and his team can dynamically blow enemies to bits by shooting chunks off them, in a method similar to dismemberment in *Dead Space*, though sadly BioWare wasn't prepared to show it running.

It sounds a useful as well as fun addition, as this time Shepard faces proper, full-on bosses in the story's more epic moments. Some are so

PICK UP AND SLAY Is that the *Normandy's* drop-ship we see hovering above this firefight? Yup, we're back on board for *ME3*.

REAP WHAT'S SOWN The bulk of enemies are Reapers, or rather, the abominations the Reapers have created through their collection of the galaxy's dominant species.

MASS O' FACT: WHY IT ROCKS

91%
AVERAGE REVIEW SCORE

New York Times' Game of the Year

80
GAMING AWARDS IN TOTAL

94%
AVERAGE REVIEW SCORE ON PS3

PTOM Gold Award winner

Golden Joystick Game of the Year 2010

More than 100 'Best of' awards

10
REVIEW SCORE IN PTOM

More than seven million series sales

SIZE MATTERS Levels are far larger and less templated than they were in previous *Mass Effect* games.

> "Dynamically blow enemies to bits by shooting chunks off them."

huge that guns are useless, however. One, for example, requires Shepard to lure a Reaper ship into a Thresher Maw, before escaping as the two galactic titans scrap to the death. In fact, many of the core story levels are built around the largest, most dramatic moments in the galaxy-wide fight against the Reapers.

Everything we've seen points to a game unrivaled for sheer grandeur and scale. Not in literal terms of environments or boss fights, but in the way the narrative brings together the characters and themes of an entire universe for one final, apocalyptic showdown.

And not only that, it gathers all the decisions players made previously and somehow resolves them within the same framework. It's phenomenally ambitious, prompting us to question how BioWare intends to *end* such a leviathan undertaking.

"Spectacularly!" laughs Hudson. "We know how we want it to end and we've already established what makes the series special. It's really about the emotions people will feel as the series comes to a close, because we could just end it as a war story. 'Wow, things blow up and we routed the bad guys. Hurray!' But I think we're doing something more interesting. We have a lot of respect for the characters we've created and the relationships we've built, and I think these will be the interesting things at the end."

So we've seen *Mass Effect 3* in pieces, we know *that* story has enormous potential, and we know BioWare is confident and capable enough to deliver something truly epic... Something far, far greater than the sum of its parts.

10 NEXT PS3 RPGs

Because we just can't get enough of role-playing, here are 10 more hotly anticipated PS3 RPGs. Sure, not all of them are as huge as *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* or *Mass Effect 3*, but they're all worthy contenders in their own right.

By Michael A. Cunningham

PUB **SQUARE ENIX** DEV **SQUARE ENIX** ETA **2012**

1 FINAL FANTASY XIII-2

WHAT IS IT? This direct sequel to the polarizing *Final Fantasy XIII* picks up where things left off with Lightning and her crew. Lightning's personality won't change, but she might not have the same powers as she did in the original game. Still, she's a force to be reckoned with against a new, mysterious male antagonist.

WHY WE CARE. With *FFXIII's* framework already in place, new content can be added while the battle system and other gameplay facets are tweaked to perfection.

J-POP? Fear not, Lightning won't be singing and dancing like Yuna and her gal pals did in *FFX-2*. *FFXIII-2* has a much darker tone than its predecessor.

2 TALES OF GRACES F

WHAT IS IT? This action RPG is the 12th "mothership" *Tales* game and features a seamless overworld and combat scheme known as Style Shift Linear Motion Battle System.

WHY WE CARE Maintaining the tradition of having a strong combat focus, *Graces F's* battle system allows characters to freely swap between two styles of combat. Players can also expect humorous skits between the game's party members.

ENHANCED? This former Wii game has been upgraded for the PS3. It offers higher-resolution graphics, more skits, additional costumes, and a new story arc to play through.

PUB **NAMCO BANDAI** DEV **NAMCO TALES STUDIO** ETA **TBD**

3 DUNGEON SIEGE III

WHAT IS IT? East meets west in an unlikely pairing as Obsidian takes up the reins from Gas Powered Games to develop this dungeon crawler for Square Enix. This is also the first game in the series to be available on a console (the rest were PC only).

WHY WE CARE Obsidian has earned a strong reputation for crafting stories, so we're interested to see how the game's four playable characters develop and how our choices impact the plot. But that aside: Who doesn't simply love gathering loot with friends?

MULTIPLAYER? Up to four players are able to select one of the game's characters for easy drop-in/drop-out cooperative play. While the host is the one who has the final say on all decisions, teammates get to share their opinion when choices arise.

PUB **SQUARE ENIX** DEV **OBSIDIAN ENT.** ETA **JUNE**

PUB **DEEP SILVER** DEV **PIRANHA BYTES** ETA **TBD**

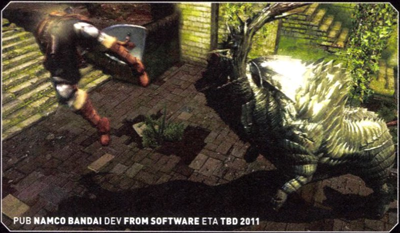
4 RISEN 2: DARK WATERS

WHAT IS IT? *Risen 2* comes to us from the creators of the *Gothic* series. This European-developed open-world adventure will have us swashbuckling from island to island in true pirate fashion instead of being sequestered in a single area, as in the first game.

WHY WE CARE The hero in *Risen 2* is more interested in visiting the local tavern and charming ladies than charging into an enemy stronghold, so this change in perspective should be enough to entice those tired of the norm.

QUEST FOR BOOTY? Not only is the game's world much larger, offering multiple islands to pillage and loot, but the graphical engine has received an overhaul as well. The changes are not only cosmetic: questing has been improved to allow for multiple ways to complete missions.

5 DARK SOULS



PUB **NAMCO BANDAI** DEV **FROM SOFTWARE** ETA **TBD 2011**

WHAT IS IT? This is the spiritual successor to 2009's surprise hit *Demon's Souls. Dark Souls* brings back the prior game's brutality and exploration, but this isn't simply more of the same—the expanded offerings include more weapons, skills, and multiplayer options.

WHY WE CARE *Demon's Souls* was a merciless experience that could crush even the most hardcore gamer. The *Dark Souls* team claims this game will be even more difficult, so we're bracing for an even greater challenge than before.

DEATH WISH While *Demon's Souls* took pleasure in killing us, it was rarely unfair in how it did so—shortcuts could be unlocked and items were maintained, so dying was simply an inconvenience... and a learning experience. Hopefully, *Dark Souls* will be able to walk that same fine line.

6 DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION

WHAT IS IT? The third game in the *Deus Ex* series and a prequel to the original, *Human Revolution* takes place in a world where people are granted superhuman abilities through augmentations. The main character, Adam Jensen, is just one example of this: He was injured during an assault on his company and received an augmentation to stay alive.

WHY WE CARE Flip back to page 40 for our hands-on preview.

CHOICE? When it comes to completing missions, *Revolution* leaves the "how" in our hands. We can blast our way through areas or sneak through the back door to reach our goal. Gadgets can play a big part, or we can use our silver tongue to talk our way past those who would obstruct our path.

PUB **SQUARE ENIX** DEV **EIDOS MONTREAL** ETA **AUGUST**

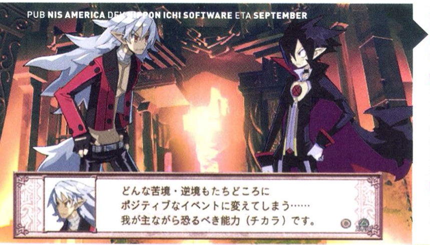
PUB **WARNER BROS. INTERACTIVE ENT.** DEV **SNOWBLIND STUDIOS** ETA **2011**

7 LORD OF THE RINGS: WAR IN THE NORTH

WHAT IS IT? J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth is a perfect fit for an action-RPG, and this upcoming title takes full advantage of it.

WHY WE CARE Snowblind isn't just tossing out a cookie-cutter RPG with *Lord of the Rings* branded on it. Instead, it's crafting an adventure to be played solo or with friends. Be prepared for battles in territories mentioned but not explored in the core trilogy rather than rehashing highlights from the books or movies.

LORE? Players will jump into combat as a dwarf, elf, or human, each race with its own unique talents. There will also be a handful of Middle-earth locations taking the forefront, such as Mount Gundabad, a sacred dwarf mountain that has been overrun by orcs, and the Ettenmoors, a vile highland infested with evil.



PUB **NIS AMERICA** DEV **NIPPON ICHI SOFTWARE** ETA **SEPTEMBER**

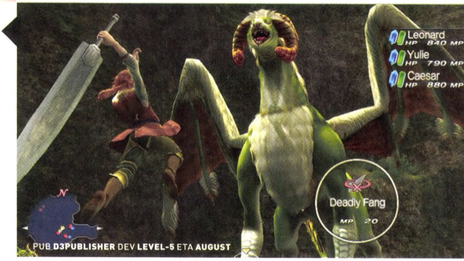
どんな苦境・逆境もたちどころに
ポジティブなイベントに変えてしまう……
我が主ながら恐るべき能力（チカラ）です。

8 DISGAEA 4: A PROMISE UNFORGOTTEN

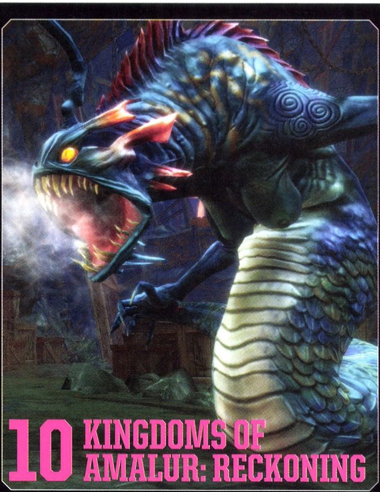
WHAT IS IT? This is the fourth game in Nippon Ichi's flagship tactical RPG series and the second to appear on PS3. Known for its wacky humor and vast customization options, the *Disgaea* series has a huge cult following.
WHY WE CARE One of the biggest complaints about *Disgaea 3* was its lack of graphical prowess in this high-definition age. Thankfully, *Disgaea 4* looks to improve on the visuals.
GETTING POLITICAL? Bribing or fighting the Netherworld senators to get our way is nothing new for the series, but this one puts politics at the head and even features a parody of President Barack Obama.

9 WHITE KNIGHT CHRONICLES II

WHAT IS IT? This is the second half and finale of the *White Knight Chronicles* story. Players continue the quest to stop the evil Magi organization.
WHY WE CARE The original game ended on a cliffhanger, so we're curious to see how it ends. Thankfully, this release will also come with the first game packed in. Fans will get to relive the story from the first game while enjoying improvements to the battle system.
ORIGINS? Level-5 handed development of a PSP version of *Chronicles* to veteran RPG developer Matrix Software, though it looks as if *White Knight Chronicles: Origins* will only see an English-language release in Europe.



PUB **D3PUBLISHER** DEV **LEVEL-5** ETA **AUGUST**



10 KINGDOMS OF AMALUR: RECKONING

PUB **ELECTRONIC ARTS** DEV **BIG HUGE GAMES** ETA **2012**

WHAT IS IT? *Reckoning* blends open-world questing and brutal *God of War*-style combat into a single-player RPG. With beautiful environments and a slick battle system, this game looks to be much more than just another fantasy RPG.
WHY WE CARE While having big names such as R. A. Salvatore and Todd McFarlane behind this project might be enough, the team is also filled with RPG creativity. *Oblivion* lead designer Ken Rolston is guiding *Reckoning* and his staff includes devs from Bethesda and other noted RPG makers.
CHANGE-UP? Players won't have to pick a class at the game's start, but instead will be able to mix and match skills from three unique ability trees.

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PlayStation
The Official Magazine

Reviews

Your essential guide to new releases

This is one heck of a diverse medium we've got here. This month's reviews section alone contains two dramatic crime procedurals, a family-friendly block-busting blockbuster, a dark, twisted take on a classic tale, and a down and dirty racer that had us motoring throughout the world. Videogames offer something for everyone.

We really mean it, too. Despite being a mature-rated title, anyone can appreciate the stunning facial animations (and accompanying gameplay) of the innovative *L.A. Noire*. And though *LEGO Pirates of the Caribbean* might be a kid-friendly experience, it doesn't mean older gamers will be immune to its renewed charm.

There's also apocalyptic shooting and the best unlockable weapon ever in *Red Faction: Armageddon*, as well as a deep, quirky Japanese role-playing game in *Record of Agarest War: Zero*. And let's not forget '80s computer classic *Wizardry: Labyrinth of Lost Souls*, summoned to life once again as an inexpensive downloadable title.

With every genre, theme, and experience level explored, gaming provides a richness not always found in modern pop culture.

RED FACTION: ARMAGEDDON
The hammer is gone, but the destuction is not. We shoot up both enemies *and* the environment in this sci-fi sequel.

DIRT 3
A little dirt never hurt anyone. A lot of dirt, however, is called a landslide. Just keep that in mind while tearing around the outdoor tracks of *Dirt 3*.

ALICE: MADNESS RETURNS
Madness returns, as do buckets of blood, legions of grotesque monsters, and a truckload of ruined childhoods. Plus, lots and lots and lots of jumping.

How we score our reviews...

10 Awesome Instant classic that's nearly PlayStation perfection.

9 Excellent Highly recommended and a great investment.

8 Great Wonderful yet still possesses minor flaws.

7 Good Enjoyable but with definite room for improvement.

6 Acceptable A decent offering, but one that only satisfies in places.

5 Mediocre A game that's both fun and frustrating in equal measure.

4 Flawed Too flawed to be anything more than a curiosity.

3 Poor A seriously defective game with no long-term appeal.

2 Awful A disgrace to the bargain bin. Avoid it like the plague.

1 Raw Sewage Apparently, feces *can* be pressed on a disc.

GOLD AWARD
PlayStation

Our Highest Accolade
The gold award is presented to any game that we feel demonstrates significant innovation, near flawless gameplay, great graphics, and profound appeal.

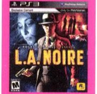
In this city of crime, it's best to carry both a badge and a firearm.

GOLD AWARD PlayStation The Official Magazine

L.A. Noire

Gaming finally gets real

Info



Format PS3
Pub Rockstar Games
Dev Team Bondi
Price $59.99
ESRB Mature
It's like being the star of our very own AMC TV show.

Some words of advice for those considering a turn with *L.A. Noire*. And, to be clear, that means anyone who's old enough to see an R-rated movie, because *Noire* is one of those rare releases that truly should appeal to *any* type of gamer.

First, don't mistake *L.A. Noire* for an RPG. Easy enough on the surface, perhaps—but it's a point worth making because this was our biggest struggle during the initial hours of our playtest. Yes, there are no hit points, no stats to fiddle with, no game-altering choices; *L.A. Noire* does not involve role-playing in the narrow sense of the term. What the game does offer, however, is a linear, narrative-driven experience full of well-developed characters who are among the most believable we've encountered on our PS3. This is notable because, throughout the history of modern gaming, we've been "trained" (for lack of better word) to immerse ourselves into these kinds of rich third-person experiences by *becoming* our on-screen hero. In short, when the virtual person we control is offered an in-game choice, we are faced with an almost unshakable urge to approach it by asking: What would Detective Cole Phelps do here? And it only makes sense: This is Phelps' adventure, after all, and we're just along for the ride.

This, we found, is the exact *wrong* approach to solving cases in this sprawling adventure. It's precisely why we flubbed some early interrogations, leaving us feeling a bit less intelligent than we're comfortable with. When faced with the choice of believing our witness, accusing him of lying, or pressing for more details, we kept putting ourselves into the virtual psyche of Phelps; we tried to "game" the game by guessing what we thought was the "correct" answer.

But *L.A. Noire* isn't that kind of game. Indeed, it's during these interrogations that *L.A. Noire*—despite borrowing liberally from classic 2D point-and-

Five good ways To improve your interrogation skills

1. **Pay attention**
A twitch, a grimace—any quirky movements are indications something's askew.

2. **Look down**
Feel free to leisurely review the case notes and clues. Your suspect ain't going anywhere.

3. **Everyone's a liar**
There's no risk in accusing someone of lying; Phelps can always back off.

4. **Listen**
An accused liar usually tells Phelps what kind of clue he needs to prove his case.

5. **When in doubt, doubt**
It's Phelps' most powerful weapon, and it's often the correct answer.

Busting perps is all in day's work for police detectives.

"Phelps is the most human of videogame characters."

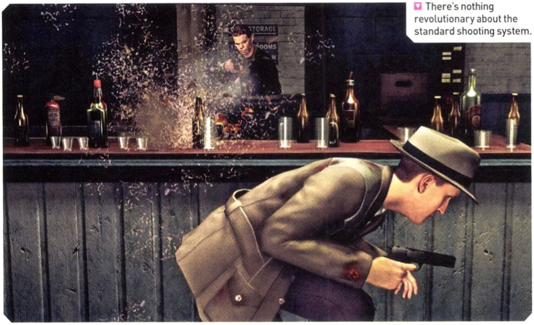
click adventures—proves itself to be utterly unique. Here, the fourth wall drops and we literally become the interrogator, using multiple inputs to determine the best course of action. *We* are the ones poring through the clues we've meticulously uncovered, and *we* are the ones who must read our subject's detailed facial expressions and reactions to determine when to believe and when to doubt. In the interrogation room, Phelps is no longer a filter. Sure, we see him on screen during the conversations, but our focus should be squarely on the witness, and our goal is to use our own wits to determine the best options, completely ignoring any notions of role-playing as Phelps.

To be fair, this is not necessarily a flaw in the game. It's not *L.A. Noire's* fault that the history of gaming weighs heavily on us. But it is something we had to contend with, and once we came to this realization, the core gameplay—the detective work—became significantly more gratifying. We still flubbed a few interrogations, but we succeeded much more than we failed, and we felt all the smarter for it.

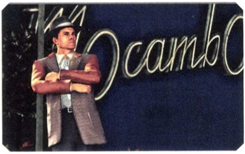
A Tangled Web

Our second bit of advice: Don't be afraid to be wrong. Phelps is the most human of videogame characters; he couldn't possibly be correct in every interrogation, and he's bound to miss a clue or connection here or there. That's a lesson we, as the players, would do well to learn. It's tough to resist the urge to quit and restart when an interrogation starts going south, but save the "retries" for a second playthrough. Trust us, it'll make both playthroughs that much better.

Our final words of wisdom: Forgive ▶▶



There's nothing revolutionary about the standard shooting system.



> "The polygons give way to flesh-and-blood and it's easy to forget that we're in a game."

the game its first few hours. Early on, *Noire* throws a lot of narrative threads at the player, and the result is a muddled, diffuse experience. It's still interesting, and undeniably compelling, but it didn't quite grab us until the three separate threads—the main storyline; flashbacks to Phelps' World War II combat experiences; and side stories unveiled in discoverable newspapers—started to come together. Even within the main storyline, it was only once we started to see commonalities among our discrete cases—stretching back to our early days on the traffic desk all the way up through homicide, vice, and beyond—that the game really took off. We'll avoid spoilers here, but *Noire* is as much an individual's story as it is a twisted tale of widespread corruption and institutional criminality on par with cinematic masterpieces like Roman Polanski's *Chinatown*.

Facing Reality

Even before we came to our three big realizations about how best to enjoy *Noire*, the game amazed us with its revolutionary graphics. The proprietary MotionScan tech—in which an actor's face is scanned from multiple angles to replicate true facial expressions—is astounding in practice. Here, the dip into the uncanny valley is fleeting. Soon enough, the polygons give way to flesh and blood, and it's easy to forget that we're in a game, not some high-end TV drama. The first time we saw a character move her eyebrows separately during a seemingly candid moment of confusion, or the moment we saw the neck and jowls of an older gentlemen waggle as he shook his head in anger—these were both immersive in the moment and impressive in retrospect. But most important of all, this isn't just used to deliver a cinematic experience but also as a core gameplay mechanic. Reading faces is a remarkably refreshing bit of gameplay, even when the twitches are a bit exaggerated or the tics seem overly obvious. It forced us to lean forward and engage with the game in a new way, and it remained interesting throughout the 20-plus hours we put into the first playthrough.

As for the rest of the game, our opinion varied throughout, but for the most part everything got better the more we played. Each "case" follows a basic template: Start with a cinematic that offers a peek at the crime committed, get assigned to the case back at the precinct, head out to the crime scene to collect the initial clues, then follow the leads where they take us, visiting multiple locations and interrogating persons-of-interest on the spot, culminating in a final set of interrogations and an arrest. Along the way, bits of action—fistfights, shootouts, foot- and car chases—break up the detective work. We can also respond to street crimes for a quick bit of action while driving through the impressively immense and gorgeous re-creation of 1940s Los Angeles.

The casework itself is full of peaks and valleys (just like real police work, we assume): Some of the crime scenes are devastatingly intriguing, like the string of dead female bodies littering the first half the game (some fully nude and disturbingly mutilated). Others can be painfully mundane exercises in, say, walking around an apartment and tapping X until we come across a legitimate clue—basically, pixel-hunting in 3D. That said, each crime scene is packed with intricate details, and the sheer variety of settings—inside and outside, daytime or nighttime, cozy homes and dilapidated homeless camps—is impressive. And as we began to care more about the overarching story, the occasional drudgery of the investigations became a welcome part of the rhythms of life in *Noire*, another bit of verity in a virtual world.

Time for Action

As for the action sequences, our initial notes were littered with comments lik

Cast List

TRAFFIC

Stefan Bekowsky
A good guy who shows Phelps the ropes.

HOMICIDE

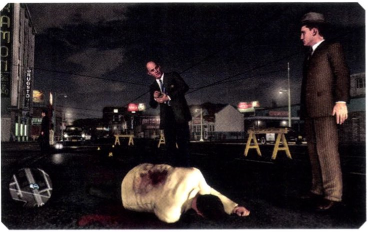
Rusty Galloway
Keeps it simple, keeps it stupid.

VICE

Roy Earle
What lurks behind that smirk?

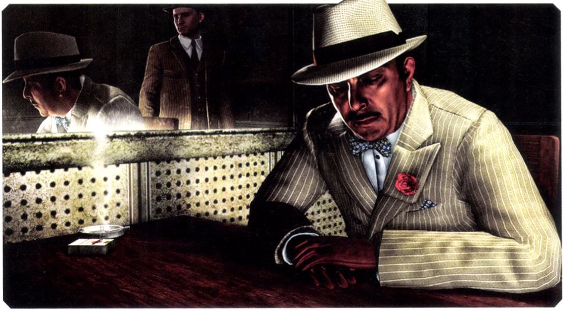
ARSON

Herschel Biggs
He doesn't do partners.



Phelps will move from desk to desk, working traffic cases, homicides, robberies, vice cases, murders, and arsons. He gets new partners, too.

Detective Phelps adheres to the belief that happiness is a warm gun.



"I say it was you, Colonel Mustard, with the rope. Why, I bet you're not even a colonel!"

"It's too bad the game keeps getting in the way of the story," and "For a game that's all about precision, the driving and shooting can be remarkably imprecise." But, to be fair, those are *early* impressions. The driving, in fact, is on the stronger side for an open-world game, with cars that handle well enough to make it easy to get around, especially after we got used to the traffic patterns. The biggest challenge here was adjusting to driving as a cop: Unlike most open-world games, running over citizens is frowned upon. As for the shooting: It's somewhat last-gen in its approach—a very basic example of third-person cover-based stop-and-pop gunplay—but it's effective enough as a way to deliver bursts of quick action, and it even produced a few thrills later in the game during a handful of epic shootouts. The only consistent stumble: the side missions. Almost all of them were variations on a handful of themes—quick car chases, foot chases, and shootouts, with no detective work involved. They're there, primarily, as extra fodder to increase our rank, thus opening up more Intuition points (an assist for challenging interrogations), kind of like grinding in an RPG.

The game wraps up neatly, with a final act that's more about action than detective work, abandoning the interrogations for a more intense series of events. It's a tough ending, storywise, pulling no punches while pulling together the disparate threads woven throughout this adventure. We have a few lingering issues with a perspective shift in the final cases (saying more would spoil it)—but we applaud the daring involved in crafting such a rich and mature videogame story and world. In many ways, *L.A. Noire* is similar to an AMC TV series (with which the game shares a star in *Mad Men's* Aaron Staton): It's a slow build, but once hooked, we couldn't get enough of this provocative adventure, with its compelling characters and innovative gameplay. It's not perfect, but it's also unlike anything else on the PS3 right now, and it's worthy of multiple playthroughs—at least until the first batch of downloadable content arrives to further populate *L.A. Noire's* irresistible world. GARY STEINMAN

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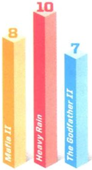
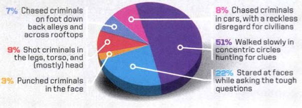
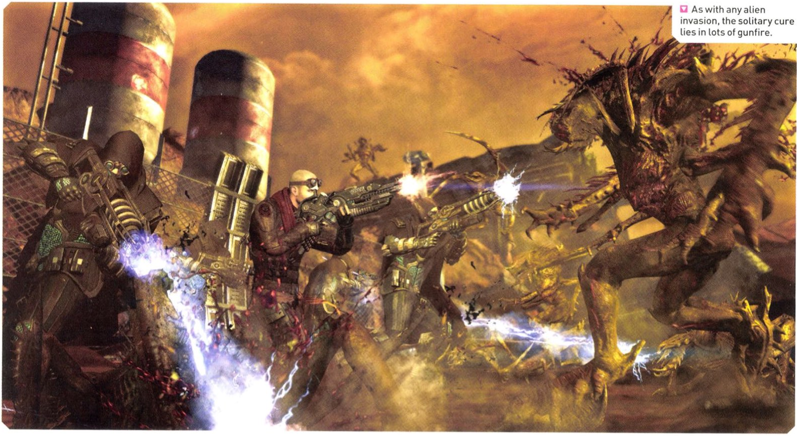


ScorePole

In a world of crime and punishment, *L.A. Noire* makes a compelling case for itself.

What we did in... L.A. Noire





As with any alien invasion, the solitary cure lies in lots of gunfire.

Red Faction Armageddon

Crimson and collapsible

Info

PS3
RED FACTION
ARMAGEDDON
THQ

Format PS3
Pub THQ
Dev Volition
Price $59.99
ESRB Mature
It's like a physics demo with claws.

This is a Nelson Muntz "ha-ha" moment. Using a magnetizing gun, *Red Faction: Armageddon* hero Darius Mason has collapsed a nearby building and sent its wreckage hurtling down toward a horde of creepy-crawlies. The crushing is great—magnificent, really—and the mocking response it evokes is wholly *Simpsons*-esque.

As Mason, we're given access to an inventive arsenal of weaponry and set against evil cultists and even more evil monsters. We're provided tools letting us build and destroy and rebuild, and the results are suitably cacophonous and entertaining.

Chief among the game's delights is its environmental destructibility. Mason can whack, melt, collapse, and blow up everything around him. As an expression of game physics, this is wonderful in and of itself, but it also affords us the opportunity to be creative: We drop ceilings on enemies. We yank the floor from under their feet. We use the Nano Forge device to reconstitute destroyed crates for cover, then hurl the boxes as makeshift projectiles to wreck a building, crushing the enemies shooting from within it. If we feel there are moments *Armageddon* skimps on the fun, well, we can damn well make our own.

Fun Gun

In-game weaponry, too, deserves praise. The Magnet gun alone is worth the price of admission. It requires two projectiles be shot—any object struck with the first projectile will be violently attracted to the second projectile,

Seeing red Mason's Martian multiplayer mayhem

In Ruin mode, destruction earns points. A leaderboard tracks the damage we inflict.

A multiplayer bonus encourages us to keep up a steady stream of wreckage.

Infestation lets us team up with friends to survive an onslaught.

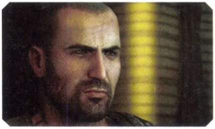
With four players, Infestation is a symphony of flying junk and explosions.

Fighting with friends is good strategy. Fighting amongst friends? Not so good.

ProTip: Do not attempt to peacefully negotiate a mutually beneficial arrangement with these aliens. Instead, use guns to shoot them until they die.

It was the breast of times. It was the worst of times. For Mars, that is.

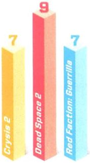
Bad guys make good guys do bad things.



Good guys do bad things for the sake of good.

wherever we choose to fire it. Its applications were numerous and wonderful; we shot monsters into monsters, monsters into buildings, collapsed buildings on cultists, hurled foes into lava and sent them rocketing into the distant horizon without ever feeling the need to switch to another implement of death. Yet, the weapons were there if we wanted to use them. The Magnet gun stands as an excellent complement to *Armageddon's* diverse arsenal, which runs the gamut from explosive vortex-shooting guns to an unlockable, gaseously hilarious, end-of-game reward in the rainbow-farting unicorn, Mr. Toots.

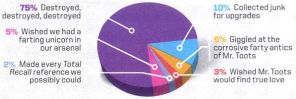
As a straightforward third-person shooter, *Armageddon* fares less well. It overstays its welcome, padding out the proceedings by stuffing Mason into carts, boats, walkers, armored suits, and a hovering assault craft. In spots, the game plays out like a dull run through the Death Star's superstructure, as we're required to maneuver in tight quarters while shifting between different viewing modes: one which allows us to see enemies clearly and another that lets us simply see the environments our ship is scraping against. Worst of all, the developers weren't able to decide how to end their game, so *Armageddon* includes two endings—either of which works just fine, but highlight someone's desperate need to include more play time at any cost.



ScorePole

We're on the eve of destruction, but *Red Faction: Armageddon* fares well against other alien shooters.

What we did in... Red Faction: Armageddon



Accidental Overdose

Bloated, *Armageddon* loses its luster. This is sad because in addition to its weaponry and physics, the game does a great job of throwing fast-moving, swarming, hyperkinetic enemies at us in great numbers. Its combat had us swinging guns wildly in all directions trying to track enemies, and even with the much-needed lock-on feature, we were challenged to keep up. Using the Magnet gun, say, in later levels becomes a genuine feat of skill because everything is tossed at us in a rapid-fire blur wherein we barely have time to think, let alone shoot the two projectiles the weapon requires. It's here combat becomes a breathless, thrilling affair—and a genuine fight for survival.

For our money, *Armageddon* needn't linger but rather leap at us with tooth and claw, tear, and then depart.

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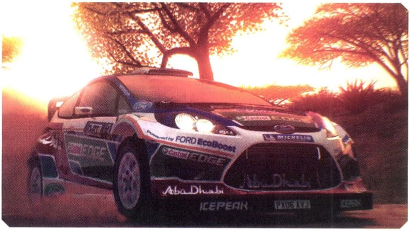
GREG ORLANDO



Dirt 3's visuals lack the crispness of *Gran Turismo 5*, but the particle system is exemplary and creates convincing dust clouds, smoke, and weather effects.

GOLD AWARD
PlayStation The Official Magazine

Dirt 3

Offroad but on track

Info

Format PS3
Pub Codemasters
Dev Codemasters
Price $59.99
ESRB Teen
It's like *GRID* decided to get down and dirty.

Like the sport it depicts, *Dirt 3* stands at the intersection of the traditional and the contemporary. Purists might decry the diminishment of the motorsport's classic time-trial format, but the infusion of X Games-esque offshoots such as Rallycross, Head 2 Head, and Gymkhana broadens the appeal.

For once, accessibility isn't a four-letter word. Hardcore and casual gamers alike can appreciate Rallycross' competitive track-based racing action, Head 2 Head's split-track timed showdowns, and Gymkhana's eclectic blend of car tricks, drifting, and block smashing. As if this cornucopia of race styles wasn't enough, the unlockable Battersea compound offers an array of stunt driving challenges in an open obstacle-littered driving playground. There's a style to suit most any driving gamer's tastes, and it's wrapped in a structural and functional presentation reminiscent of Codemaster's excellent tarmac racer *GRID*.

The franchise's simulation-focused roots, however, do remain intact. Cross country time trial races occur in four primary locales—Norway, Finland, Kenya, and Michigan—and feature a broad selection of driving terrain, conditions, and routes. As befits rallying, the traction is unpredictable, making for a steeper learning curve than most racing games.

Getting comfortable behind *Dirt 3's* steering wheel, at least initially, requires more tweaking than most other racing games as the level of A.I. competition is based on a Goldilocks-like array of difficulty settings: The everything-assisted Casual is too easy, the weighted Intermediate surprisingly challenging, and the all-assists-off Advanced ridiculously hard. There's a huge gap in required skill between these selections, but an extensive range of customizable vehicle and driver assist settings are available.

Dirt 3 doesn't skimp on content, with more than twice as many race routes as its predecessor. Multiplayer is also offered in two-player splitscreen and up-to-eight players online varieties, and the new Party modes offer wacky fun like battling robot invaders.

Quibbles are few, with the primary issue being a razor-thin lack of immediacy and feedback in the controls. It's never a significant issue while driving, but it keeps *Dirt 3's* vehicles from conveying distinct driving personalities. Vehicle physics also seem curious in spots with a tendency toward floatiness and an occasional disregard for directional momentum after collisions.

Maybe Rally racing is truly at a crossroads in terms of its identity, but if it offers *Dirt 3's* abundance of varied driving experiences, there'll be great racing down whichever path is chosen. ROGER BURCHILL

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Ahh...the classic rivalries: Cats vs. Dogs, Pirates vs. Ninjas, and last but certainly not least, MX vs. ATV.

MX vs. ATV Alive

The downside of downloadable content

Info
Format PS3 **Pub** THQ
Dev Rainbow Studios
Price $39.99 **ESRB** Everyone
It's like off-road racing fun handicapped by mandatory DLC.

Is an intentionally incomplete game worth a discounted price? *MX vs. ATV: Alive* is THQ's first attempt at offering a lower price on a retail game in order to encourage the purchase of downloadable content later on. All the basic gameplay is there, but there are noticeably fewer tracks and vehicles on the disc.

The game begins with five playable courses, with more unlocked at level 10. Without DLC, we were forced to repeat the initial tracks long after we'd gold medaled them in order to level up. It seems like a calculated ploy to bore the player into buying DLC, which is a shame as *Alive* offers a fun challenge for off-road enthusiasts.

It builds on the previous game's muddy fun with a new RPM-dependent clutch feature to control power application during turns and landings. This, combined with the return of *MX vs. ATV: Reflex's* analog-stick control system and deformable terrain, helps the game feel more realistic than other off-road racers.

Alive's three game modes offer regular and short track races and an open-world free ride. Races award experience to unlock new parts and visual upgrades. It's a shame we couldn't unlock new levels at the same pace.

Ultimately, it's hard to overlook *Alive's* download-centric scheme. Instead of a solid experience, it feels crippled; a complete game thoughtlessly hacked into DLC bits. MICHAEL GRIMM

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LEGO Pirates of the Caribbean

It's a (plastic) pirate's life for me

After recently being reinvigorated by the impressive *LEGO Star Wars III: The Clone Wars*, the slowly stagnating *LEGO* franchise continues its resurgence with *LEGO Pirates of the Caribbean*, an entry that benefits most from its cinematic source material.

The series' silliness and charming cutscenes are a perfect complement to the films' cheeky style. From the cast of colorful characters to the sea-worthy settings, the four swashbuckling films provide endless fodder. TT Games even nails Jack Sparrow's defining flamboyance and nuanced flourishes—watching the mini-figure Captain Jack sway and swagger like Johnny Depp's big-screen counterpart is a definite highlight.

While the presentation has style to spare, the mechanics play it safe. That's not a bad thing, but fans who have busted up blocky bad guys, solved simple puzzles, and collected studs in previous games will know exactly what to expect. That said, some *Pirates*-specific play—such as riding in those big bone-cage balls from the second film and walking the ocean floor as an undead skeleton scallywag—puts a fresh spin on the formula. Furthermore, engaging in back-and-forth swordfights rather than swiftly slicing baddies from behind a lightsaber adds a satisfying new dynamic.

LEGO games were beginning to feel like Trophy-hunting chores (we're looking at you, *LEGO Indiana Jones 2*), but this entry, supported by value-adding couch cooperative- and free play modes, has us looking forward to whatever TT Games pulls from the toy box next. MATT CABRAL

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Info

Format PS3
Pub Disney Interactive Studios
Dev TT Games
Price $49.99
ESRB Everyone 10+
It's like having the wind at our backs and a parrot on our shoulders.

Red Johnson's Chronicles

Getting to the point without all the clicks

Info
Format PSN **Pub** Lexis Numérique
Dev Lexis Numérique
Price $12.99 **ESRB** Mature
It's like taking an interactive IQ test.

If *Red Johnson's Chronicles* is to be believed, the job of a private investigator involves: the timely delivery of hardboiled quips; the opening of various boxes, windows, and doors by solving puzzles pulled right out of a Mensa application test; interrogations of charmingly bedraggled witnesses who respond only when we pick the correct option from multiple choices; the painstaking hunt for clues in a mere handful of locations; colorful chats with a local homeless fella; and the occasional bout of action (via *Heavy Rain*-esque quick-time events).

It's a decent gig, then—and *Chronicles* is a thoroughly decent game that successfully updates the classic point-and-click adventure by keeping the pace brisk and the pixel hunting to a minimum. Still, the game suffers from problems that have plagued this genre from its earliest days: puzzles often seem tacked on with no true relation to the task at hand.

The story is amusing enough, but the real star is the setting: a contemporary metropolis portrayed with comic-book flair, set in sepia tones during the investigations (to signal its retro leanings) then converting to mostly black-and-white during key moments (to better show the bright red blood spatter). It's stylish and striking—a compelling visual complement to the 10 hours of enjoyable sleuthing and puzzle-solving on offer here. GARY STEINMAN

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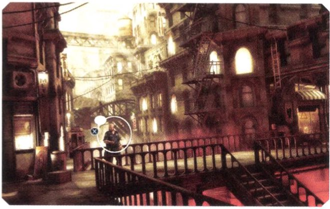
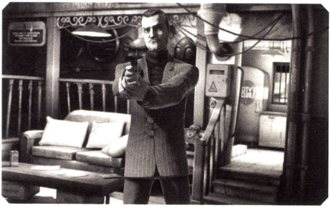
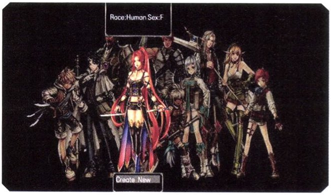
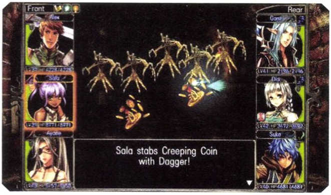


Like any good crime caper, there's always a bumbling cop who needs our help. Clueless? Perhaps. But that's where Red comes in.







Sala stabs Creeping Coin with Dagger!

Battles are slow, turn-based affairs, and there are far too many random encounters.

Info
Format PSN
Pub XSEED Games
Dev Acquire
Price $14.99
ESRB Teen
It's like the old *Wizardries* with some newly added anime flair.

Wizardry Labyrinth of Lost Souls

Mort and magic

Nostalgia sometimes reeks. In the case of *Wizardry: Labyrinth of Lost Souls*, it smells like going home again, provided said domicile was maintained by *Great Expectations'* Miss Havisham.

Wizardry emerged in the 1980s as arguably the first graphics-based RPG. It won an audience with its three-dimensional mazes, upgradeable characters, and a six-man adventuring scheme wherein we could upgrade lowly thieves, priests, fighters, and mages into, say, ninja, samurai, lords, or bishops.

Japanese developer Acquire pays homage to the *Wizardry* series and its classic formula but does it with slavish devotion. Plodding through a series of dungeons and fighting turn-based battles against static monsters popping up endlessly in random encounters had its charm when the technology wasn't able to support anything better. Now, even with the first-person perspective, the formula defines outdated and wholly unnecessary; it's nostalgia for nostalgia's sake.

Time and again, *Wizardry* opts for familiarity over gameplay, and this ensures dreary exploration.

The great truth here is that we, should we suffer this trip down memory lane, are the titular lost souls. GREG ORLANDO

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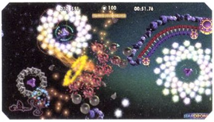
StarDrone

Format **PSN** Pub **Beatshapers** Dev **Beatshapers** Price **$9.99** ESRB **Everyone**



If aliens visited our fair planet with the sole mission of reverse-engineering the brilliantly addictive *Peggle*, but said aliens were mentally challenged and evolved with no innate concept of fun, this is what they might come up with. *StarDrone* means well, sure, but earnestness isn't what we're looking for in a pinball-meets-pachinko arcade shooter thingamabob with an out-of-control drone ship that's tasked with lighting up stars while avoiding all manner of annoying obstacles. A handful of the 50-plus levels are mindless diversions; the rest are regrettable, even with Move support. The game might shoot for the stars, but it really only succeeds in being a drone. GARY STEINMAN

PlayStation 4

Thor God of Thunder

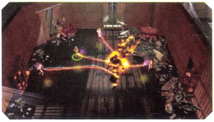
Format **PS3** Pub **Sega** Dev **Liquid Entertainment** Price **$59.99** ESRB **Teen**

We have felt more godlike squatting over a filthy toilet. *Thor: God of Thunder* sins often and hugely, but its primary offense to man is its indifference to the subject matter. Beyond being poorly animated and graphically bland, the game gives us no insight, no hint whatsoever as to what it must feel like to be a being of immense power. Why would a Norse god have to push cold air out of the way to avoid being frozen? Why is a god being tasked with dull platforming challenges? It's because the Thor in this game is cookie-cutter, and his challenges come cut-and-pasted (poorly) from games where the developers strived for more than a paycheck. GREG ORLANDO

PlayStation 2

Ghostbusters Sanctum of Slime

Format **PSN** Pub **Atari** Dev **Behaviour Interactive** Price **$9.99** ESRB **Everyone 10+**



From the pale imitation of the *Ghostbusters*' anthemic theme to the deplorable new characters, *Ghostbusters: Sanctum of Slime* is a catastrophe of supernatural proportions. A twin-stick shooter for up to four victims, *Slime* has players trudging around with their proton packs, pressing the analog stick in the direction of the boring ghosts, then moving to another boring room where—suprise!—more boredom awaits. *Slime* moves like a sloth, and its color-coded beams/ghost-capturing scheme is idiotic. As diehard *Ghostbusters* fans, we can honestly say this is the first time that busting absolutely did not make us feel good. JAMES COATES

PlayStation 3

DLC Roundup

Mass Effect 2 Arrival

Price **$6.99** ESRB **Mature**

Bridging the gap between *Mass Effect* and *Mass Effect 2*, this mission sends Shepard on a solo jaunt into Batarian space to recover a missing agent and gather proof of an impending invasion. This streamlined add-on is light on the gum flapping and heavy on the action.

Bulletstorm Gun Sonata

Price **$9.99** ESRB **Mature**

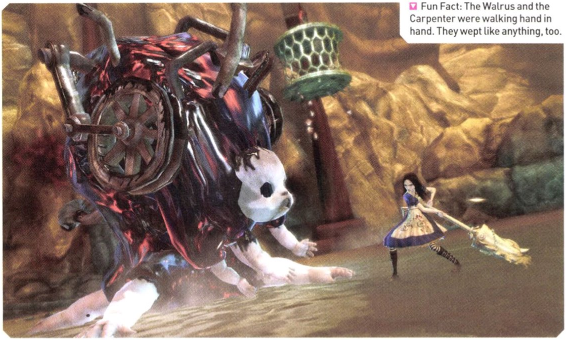
Opportunities for wanton slaughter are opened with this pack that adds two fresh maps for the game's solo Echoes mode alongside three additional maps for fragging with friends in the multiplayer Anarchy mode. It also includes two sexy new leash designs to sweeten the skill-killing pot.

Download of the Month

Stacking The Lost Hobo King

Price $4.99 **ESRB** Everyone 10+

Our favorite Russian babushka dolls venture deep into the troubled land of Camelfoot to deliver another round of stylish puzzle adventure by restoring vitality to the hobo kingdom. Exploring this fresh realm presents three challenges that offer multiple solutions and several new types of unusual stacking dolls to hop into and fiddle around with. Developer Double Fine's quirky humor runs rampant once again.



Fun Fact: The Walrus and the Carpenter were walking hand in hand. They wept like anything, too.

Alice can upgrade her weapons by collecting teeth. Beware the powered-up hobby horse!

A pepper grinder can be used to shoot pig snouts for both fun and also profit.

Alice Madness Returns

Do the math: ambition, distraction, uglification, and derision

Behold the power of cake. It's turned Alice Liddell from a jump-happy waif to all-powerful crushinator. The Executioner—a persistent and previously invincible foe—lies under her gargantuan boot heel, an object lesson in *you do not f-ck with a mentally fractured giant.*

Ambitious to its core, *Alice: Madness Returns* plunges through the mind of a very troubled young woman. Ostensibly a third-person adventure, *Alice* mirrors the thoroughly disjointed psyche of its female protagonist, bouncing from platforming to combat while interspersing extended sequences of puzzle-solving, two-dimensional adventure, side-scrolling shooting, rhythm challenges, and baby doll's head rolling. As Liddell's sanity unravels, her environments get ever more twisted and disturbing: An asylum scene shows Tweedledee and Tweedledum turning screws to bore into our heroine's brains; abused children are portrayed as dolls, their skin peeled, brains exposed, and stiched mouths pulled into rictus.

Brawling

MELEE WEAPONS

Smash
The vorpal blade goes snicker-snack, while the hobby horse gives monsters a whack.

PROJECTILE WEAPONS

Shoot
Have some tea as shot by a teapot. Get ground down with a pepper shooter.

An idyllic Wonderland shatters under the strain. Liddell may be jumping and soaring through Wonderland's heavens, but she's also grounded in its blood-smeared mire. Horrific images are built to shock us, but they also serve as a distraction. The game's psychological element is far more intriguing than its gameplay, and not all the genre shifting in the world can stay this assessment.

A poor pace potholes the proceedings. The game lingers on its jumping puzzles, reveling in presenting us with open vistas that require navigation across partially invisible pathways, weighted platforms, billowing air vents, and ever-shifting floors. With this limited vocabulary, *Alice* chugs and chugs and chugs. Timing challenges are added and overdone, and some are additionally hampered by the need to shoot targets with a Pepper Grinder gun saddled with a manual aim system that is imprecise at best. The game tops off its overlong, overly gimmick-reliant platform navigation with heroine-crushing blocks, spiked platforms, and flame spitters. In the end, we're not jumping and soaring across Wonderland but simply grinding it out.

Alice applies a heavy hand to its genre shifts, too. The message is clear: We're in a restless, ever-shifting mind searching for truth. So we can forgive *Alice* for shoehorning a bizarre doll's head ball-rolling scenario into the game's ultimate chapter but will quickly rescind our forgiveness because we have to revisit the minigame after more platforming. These games barely further the story, so we're uncertain why we're made to play them to excess.

We know Alice from Lewis Carroll's works. We're already invested in this young woman's character. We care for her safety and plunge unreservedly into the quest to repair her psyche. Spicy Horse rewards us with a character turn that, to spoil things, seems right out of an Arnold Schwarzenegger revenge fantasy. The ending is both anticlimax and character assassination, and leaves a bad taste in our mouths. We guided Alice on faith, and she rewards us by pushing her nemesis in front of a moving train like a B-movie villain. We know Alice, all right, and this Alice is no Alice at all.

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GREG ORLANDO

Info

Format PS3 **Pub** Electronic Arts
Dev Spicy Horse
Price $59.99 **ESRB** Mature
It's like psychotherapy on platforms.

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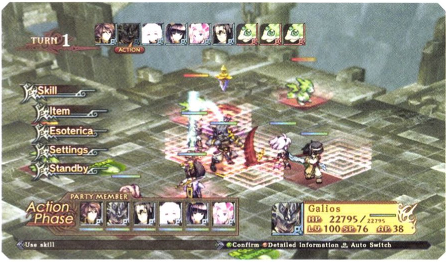
Record of Agarest War Zero

History repeating



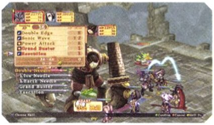
Info

PS3
Agarest War Zero

Format PS3
Pub Aksys Games
Dev Compile Heart
Price $49.99
ESRB Teen
It's like *Disgaea*, but not as clever or as original.

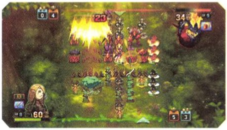
Last year's *Record of Agarest War* took classic strategy-RPG trappings and melded them with a dose of T&A with passable results. Now a prequel—*Record of Agarest War: Zero*—is following in its adequate footsteps.

Though *Zero* takes place before the dense history of the original, it tells a similar story. In fact, *Zero* could easily be seen as a reimagining of the first game...only the developers really held back on the "imagining" part, leaving us basically the same game with minor improvements.



The turn-based, grid-mapped combat does nothing to change the genre's decades-old mechanics; the only original idea is a combo system that lets players utilize two characters in a single, powerful dual move. The cast is also bursting with anime character clichés, though Japanophiles will appreciate that. The only truly novel aspect? Players must pick the right girl to marry and create offspring for the next generation of monster hunters, a hook adding a dating-game twist and replay value to an already time-intensive title. However, more time spent on *Zero* may not be such a good thing for those who aren't already fans. HENRY GILBERT

PlayStation **6**

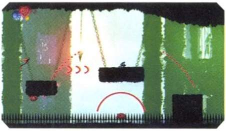


Might & Magic Clash of Heroes

Format **PSN** Pub **Ubisoft** Dev **Capybara Games**
Price **$14.99** ESRB **Everyone 10+**

Might & Magic: Clash of Heroes finds success with its puzzle mechanic and turn-based battle system. Players do battle with creatures, stacking them for attacks and creating walls for defense. Gameplay is head-and-shoulders above everything else in the genre, and while the story isn't memorable, it does a fantastic job of introducing different unit types to prepare us for robust multiplayer offerings. A charming 2D visual style tops off the package, making this one can't-miss hodgepodge. HOLLANDER COOPER

PlayStation **9**

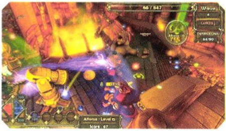


Outland

Format **PSN** Pub **Ubisoft** Dev **Housemarque**
Price **$9.99** ESRB **Everyone 10+**

The visually distinctive *Outland* clearly borrows its polarity swapping mechanic from famed shmup *Ikaruga*. While most of the game focuses on fluid platforming, the action alternates between the well-executed beat-'em-up combat and strategic avoidance of deadly energy projectiles. The catch: We can switch between light and dark personas on the fly, allowing us to deflect like-colored bullets and interact with like-colored platforms. The mechanic is both clever and well implemented, and *Outland* is a smart choice for those seeking a fun PSN diversion. SCOTT BUTTERWORTH

PlayStation **8**



Dungeon Defenders

Format **PSN** Pub **Reverb Publishing** Dev **Trendy Ent.**
Price **$14.99** ESRB **Everyone 10+**

Cartoony tower defense meets action-RPG in *Dungeon Defenders* as players pick from four hero-in-training classes and guard the sacred Eternia Crystals by placing class-specific defenses in tactically chosen locations, upgrading towers, and attacking enemies. Though the high fantasy storyline lacks depth, tower defense fans will appreciate hours of fast-paced strategy and colorful character customization. A long list of dungeons and co-op modes make this a worthwhile purchase. ANNE LEWIS

PlayStation **8**

“★★★★★”

Amazing app, and it's FREE!

by Vitsnuklz

“★★★★★
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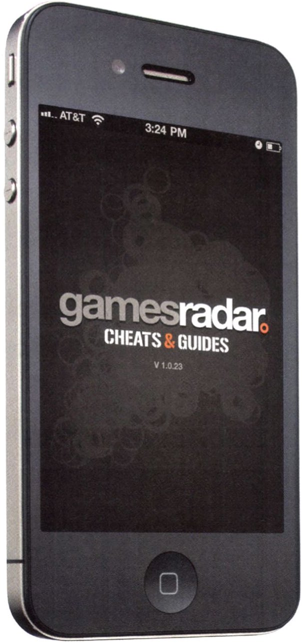
on the internet…
ALL IN ONE PLACE”
by Samael76

“★★★★★
Thank you GamesRadar for
FEEDING MY ADDICTION”
by Poconoscott



“★★★★★
GamesRadar is
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by Marcello Almaguer

“★★★★★
AWESOMESAUCE!
Great app. I love!”
by June Martin

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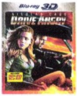
Future MEDIA WITH PASSION

Drive Angry Shot in 3D

Exploitation done right

Info



Price $34.99
Creators Patrick Lussier, Todd Farmer
Starring Nicolas Cage, Amber Heard, William Fichtner, David Morse
Rated R
Extras Audio commentary, deleted scenes, scene-specific PiP support.

Go ahead and scoff. We did while watching the brain-cell killing trailer for Nicolas Cage's latest attempt to pay off his taxes. But seldom has there been a movie that so perfectly fills its intended niche the way *Drive Angry* does. Quentin Tarantino and Robert Rodriguez have spent their whole careers obsessively spewing out action flicks paying homage to the outrageous and atrocious grindhouse/exploitation movies of the '70s and '80s. Yet *Angry* covers all the genre's over-the-top clichés with vigor, glee, and even brilliant creativity.

Yes, we said it. Forget *The King's Speech*, Cage's absurd overacting—and let's face it, whatever acting skills the man had seems to have disappeared along with his money—is pitch perfect for the ludicrous plot of a man who escaped from hell to rescue his infant granddaughter. Even better is William Fichtner's accountant as hell's agent out to recapture Cage's Milton, but who steals the show as one of the most hilariously deadpan villains in recent memory. Indeed, the entire cast chews up the blood-coated landscape with amazing focus and skill—this is a B-movie with A-movie production values.

Angry has everything exploitation lovers could ask for: sex, violence, nudity, creative profanity, and hilarious one-liners. Hell, there's even a sex/gunfight sequence, the likes of which we haven't seen since the also brilliantly absurd *Shoot 'Em Up*. The movie seldom lets up long enough to let the audience start processing the inanity of what they're watching. Every action sequence simply builds into the next, with just enough sappy exposition to suggest there was a finished script.

The true kudos go, however, to the cinematography and 3D implementation. This is simply the best and most creative use of 3D we've seen. The director takes a standard flashback-while-driving sequence, for instance, and uses 3D to masterfully layer each shot over the image behind it. *Angry* uses all the 3D tricks, with distinctive and creative results.

The extras are decent with picture-in-picture cast and crew behind-the-scenes footage, deleted scenes, and directors' commentary. We just wish Cage had chimed in for the commentary; it would have been the icing on the crazy cake. JASON D'APRILE

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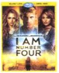
8

I Am Number Four

Cheesy violence for teens



Info

Price $39.99 **Creator** D.J. Caruso **Starring** Alex Pettyfer, Timothy Olyphant, Teresa Palmer, Dianna Agron **Rated** PG-13 **Extras** Deleted scenes, bloopers.

We realize that not everyone is old enough to enjoy the R-rated camp and glory of a movie like *Drive Angry* but, luckily, action-packed fluff and cliché is also available for the PG-13 set. *I Am Number Four* is the latest in the seemingly endless line of template-based teen novels-turned-movie, but it has great production values and a few nice surprises.

Unlike most of its ilk, the movie is heavy with sci-fi elements. The story centers on an alien kid and eight others sent to Earth after their homeworld is annihilated by a race of evil, piranha-toothed freaks covered in tribal tattoos. Since these nine kids are actually superpowered warriors, the toothy freaks are out to kill them too.

Four manages to shove a lot of explosive violence into its teen motif. The bad guys have an array of cool energy weapons and vicious giant bat creatures. The good guys have badass martial arts and parkour moves to go along with their glowing hands and telekinetic skills. Things explode, aliens (and humans) are killed in amusing and oftentimes sadistic ways, and teenage boys in particular are likely to be transfixed by the pure spectacle.

As far as spectacles go, this is a great looking movie. The effects are terrific and the fight sequences—particularly the climax battles—are amazingly well choreographed. The movie is obviously set up for a sequel, but it sure beats *Twilight* and it's a lot grittier than *Percy Jackson*. Just the same, the script is almost entirely by the numbers, and more experienced viewers will find plenty of clichés and stereotypical teen angst to ridicule.

The disc comes with a slew of deleted scenes and bloopers, along with a featurette. *Four* certainly isn't great entertainment, but the movie has enough going for it to warrant checking out—especially for younger action junkies in search of a sci-fi and super-hero themed light show. JD

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Blu-ray Roundup

The Lord of the Rings The Motion Picture Trilogy Extended Edition

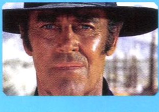
Price $119.98 **Rated** PG-13

The 11-hour epic positively shines on Blu-ray. Buyers will get all the extras of the previous releases, in addition to the fascinating documentary that accompanies each film...all in standard definition. This is still an impressive box set overall, but the lack of HD extras seems outrageously lame. 8

True Blood Season 3

Price $79.98 **Rated** NR

We still love *True Blood* for its sex and violence, but the third season tested our patience. The characters are especially whiny and the angst is amped up too much. The show is definitely worth watching, but we hope season four . tones down the girly anxiety. 7



Once Upon a Time in the West

Price $24.99 **Rated** PG-13

Sergio Leone proved he didn't need Clint Eastwood to make an epic western with this enthralling flick. Charles Bronson, Jason Robards, and, especially, Henry Fonda (as a brutal psychopath) lead the cast of outlaw misfits and Old West stereotypes. 9

Chawz

Price $29.98 **Rated** R

A Korean-made comedy/horror about a giant man-eating pig, *Chawz* isn't particularly scary, but it is entertaining as the excellent cast capitalizes on the script's sly bent. At two hours, the movie is a bit too long, but it's still a quirky little gem. 7

Want that

Lust-have stuff for PlayStation people

Neo Geo Consolized MVS

Crafted from real walnut, Analogue Interactive's wooden Neo Geo is a gorgeous game console. It isn't cheap, but costs exactly what SNK's original Neo Geo sold for back in the day.

$649

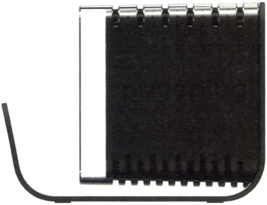
analogueinteractive.com

Pogoplug Video

The Pogoplug Video connects to external hard drives and shares streaming video, music, and images to devices anywhere with Internet access.

$199

pogoplug.com



Hot Wheels Video Racer

Equipped with an LCD screen on its bottom and onboard memory, the Video Racer functions as a navigable low-res camera, capturing up to 12 minutes of footage at 30fps.

$60

shop.mattel.com

SuperTooth HD

SuperTooth's HD speaker-phone has three times more power than a typical Bluetooth speaker and lets us update our Facebook status or Tweet by voice command.

$129

supertooth.net

Altec Lansing Octiv 650

An iPhone/iPod Touch dock that plays Netflix, YouTube, and other videos on a television set in crisp HD, it can also stream serene music and images with the free Music Mood app.

$199

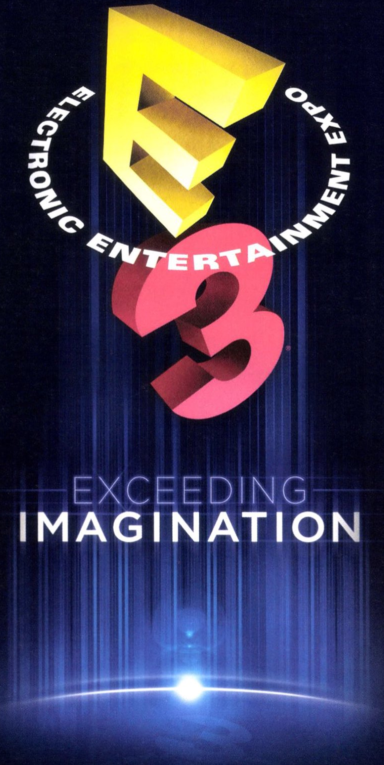
alteclansing.com

Intimus 4T Summit Wireless 5.1 Speaker System

Cut down on home theater wiring with the Summit and its uncompressed 24-Bit/96 KHz wireless digital audio.

$2,499 and up

aperionaudio.com



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PS3
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RESIDENT EVIL
Operation Raccoon City
Even the zombies are scared...
PREY 2
BATTLEFIELD 3
MOTORSTORM APOCALYPSE
BATMAN: ARKHAM CITY
DEAD ISLAND UNCHARTED
PSP RPGS CRYSIS 2

These are the new beer goggles. Even Leon looks extra sweet and tasty right about now.

These letters won't respond to themselves. Trust us, we tried that work avoidance trick before.

Email us at **PTOM_letters@futureus.com** or write to PTOM, c/o Future US, 4000 Shoreline Ct. Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

Back to Bohacik

I am writing in regard to your advice that was previously given to me (May, Issue #45). You recommended I "run around in my underwear to relive stress," and I took your advice. I won't go into detail, but I have to go see a special doctor once a week, and this new jacket they gave me is VERY constraining. I will say, though, that I get great Wi-Fi in my padded room. Is it ironic that I am playing *Arkham Asylum* while in an asylum? I like to think so. Thank you, PTOM, for your amazing advice, and life-changing wit and professionalism—and my roommate thinks so, too. **MATTHEW BOHACIK** ST. LOUIS, MO

If all padded rooms came with a PS3 and a copy of Batman: Arkham Asylum, *the world would be a much crazier place. Your story is further proof the only place to turn for life advice is the merry band of nitwits affectionately known as PTOM.*

Really?

My dad told me videogames are for little kids, and it's time to enter the real world now that I'm 18. What did he mean by that? How old are you guys? **RAFAEL VILLARREAL** PARTS UNKNOWN

The real world means getting a job, by which we mean you'll have to scrape coal in some mine somewhere, for roughly 22 hours a day, seven days a week. But it'll be totally worth it when the mine collapses and everyone applauds your bravery before they bury you in a coffin the size of a matchbook. And if you only knew the number of happy birthday punches we receive in a given year...

Socks, Optional

In the Et Cetera column (April, Issue #44) I came across Scott Butterworth's mention of TOMS Shoes. I like to think advertising doesn't work on me, and the choices I make are mine and mine alone. Then, like a well-timed guerrilla ambush, Butterworth hits me with TOMS and before I know it I'm hip-hop'n around in a pair of my very own and all I can think is, how the heck did I end up with these awesome shoes? Well, I ended up with them because of that column and Butterworth, so, long story short, TOMS totally owes you guys something. **AARON C. HOLLIS** SOMEWHERE IN TEXAS

We're not viral marketers, Aaron, and our integrity is as important to us as smooth deliciousness is as important to Royal Crown Cola or smart, efficient German design with great gas mileage is to the Audi A3, or as comfort, legroom, and on-time departures are to Jet Blue Airlines.

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Movie Madness

I was reading the article "The Movies that Shaped Modern Gaming" (May, Issue #45) and something felt missing. I think it left out one of the greatest influences of modern gaming.

Indiana Jones has been a major influence in the adventuring/puzzle-solving videogame segment from the early '90s through today. Indy is the original protagonist who spawned not only a new genre in film, but also many games based on the adventurer who gets knee-deep in baddies, has to solve puzzles to save his behind, and occasionally requires the help of a friendly sidekick. Games from *Tomb Raider* to *Uncharted* follow this formula to a T, and many other games such as *Castlevania: Lords of Shadow* still use this formula without being quite as obvious.

CHAD COURTNEY SUGAR LAND, TX

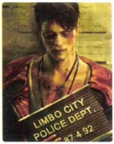
NGP for You and Me...

I'm writing to tell you my thoughts on the new NGP (Next Generation Portable) gaming system. In general, I think that the NGP is very innovative and, in a way, because of the huge jump that Sony made with the technology from the last PSP, its uses are magical. I'd actually dreamed of having a touchscreen PSP. I also like the cameras on the front and back, and I'm hoping to do some cool video chat with it, as well as play fun games that make great use of the touchscreen and the front- and back cameras. Although I don't fully understand how the touch sensors on the back of the device work. All in all, the new NGP is a very cool, fun, and innovative piece of technology, and I am greatly looking forward to getting it in my own hands when it's released (but I am very afraid of the pricing).

ABDULLAH ALMOUSALLI PARTS UNKNOWN

The NGP looks like a wonderful device, and we don't even get tired of hearing Gary tell us about the time he got to try it out. We'll have more news on the NGP, its games, and, hopefully, a detailing of its price next issue. Stay tuned.

Down with DMC



I loved your article "The Movies that Shaped Modern Gaming." You missed a big one, though, with *Devil May Cry* being inspired by the movie *Blade*. I think that's a huge omission considering that *Devil May Cry* kicked off the high-action genre that led to games like *God of War*. Not to mention that the first *Devil May Cry* game is now a PlayStation classic.

I did like how in the "PSN Best Games" section you mentioned the *Scott Pilgrim* videogame, movie, and graphic novel were all worth recommending. Especially since Reuben Langdon (who plays Dante in *Devil May Cry 3* and *4*, the English dub of the anime, and *Marvel vs. Capcom 3*) is in the *Scott Pilgrim* movie. Have you figured out that I am a HUGE *Devil May Cry* fan at this point?

I am looking forward to reading any news on the next *Devil May Cry* game. I am a little worried about Dante's new look, but am remaining cautiously optimistic.

ANTHONY COLLADO PARTS UNKNOWN

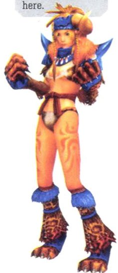
Our crack staff of movie watchers worked long and hard on that list, and we're glad you folks took the time to write in about it. Personally, we're saddened we failed to include such titanic films as The Bed That Eats, Breakin' 2: Electric Boogaloo, *and our all-time favorite,* Stop! Or My Mom Will Shoot! *Can you tell by this point that we're HUGE fans of bad movies?*

Ask Roger

Q How come the guy on the March 2011 cover who's about to shoot the other guy on the ground ain't freezing to death? Because you can clearly see that it's freezing out there.

THAD WARD PARTS UNKNOWN

A Because nothing warms the heart, or body, like killing Helghast. It's either that or he's wearing a fur-lined girdle and panties, like ferocious fur-fighter Rikku here.



Et Cetera

All the other stuff that distracts PTOM

The Killing

"Everyone looks a little bit tired in AMC's latest drama. Perhaps that's because they're worn down by the murder mystery at the heart of this moody but utterly compelling new show."

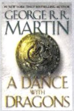
GARY STEINMAN

It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World!

"There's a ton of money, see, and it's hidden under a big W. The rest is cinematic genius, with an all-star cast and enough laughs to fill two movies. Watch it."

GREG ORLANDO

A Dance with Dragons



"It's a banner year for George R.R. Martin fans: first the HBO *Game of Thrones* TV show and now the long-awaited fifth book in the Song of Ice and Fire series. It's about @#$@! time!"

ROGER BURCHILL

Y: The Last Man

"Brian K. Vaughan's gripping saga about the world's last surviving male is not only thrilling, engrossing, and tightly written, but also an excellent entry point for those new to graphic novels. Start reading today!"

SCOTT BUTTERWORTH

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